

ABSTRACT

Title of dissertation: ICONOGRAPHY AND CONTINUITY IN WEST
 AFRICA: CALABAR TERRACOTTAS AND THE
 ARTS OF THE CROSS RIVER REGION OF
 NIGERIA/CAMEROON

Christopher Lawrence Slogar, Doctor of Philosophy, 2005

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 Archaeology

Recent archaeological investigations conducted jointly by the Nigerian National Commission for Museums and Monuments and the University of Maryland, under the direction of Ekpo Eyo, yielded a large number of decorated terracotta vessels, headrests, and anthropomorphic figurines at Calabar, Nigeria, which date to the fifth–fifteenth century A.D. The decoration includes a variety of discrete geometric motifs, such as concentric circles, spirals, lozenges, and cruciforms, among others. This iconography is described and compared to information available in historical sources in order to locate the terracottas within the broader narrative of visual culture in the Cross River region. The decoration of the terracottas reveals strong correspondences to modern art production across a variety of media, foreshadowing in particular the ideographic script called *nsibidi* (or *nsibiri*), which has been the subject of scholarly interest since the early twentieth century.

Calabar gained international prominence in the seventeenth century due to the burgeoning transatlantic slave trade, was later named the seat of the British colonial government in Southern Nigeria, and is today the capital of Cross River State, Nigeria. While the accounts of traders, missionaries, colonial officials, and modern researchers offer much information about Calabar during this time, its earlier history remains largely unknown. Thus, the terracottas offer valuable new insight into the period prior to the initiation of the transatlantic trade and reveal a continuity of artistic traditions that is significantly deeper and more widespread than previously considered.

ICONOGRAPHY AND CONTINUITY IN WEST AFRICA:
CALABAR TERRACOTTAS AND THE ARTS OF THE CROSS RIVER
REGION OF NIGERIA/CAMEROON

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	ii
List of Figures.....	v
Chapter One: Introduction.....	1
Chapter Two: Calabar Origins: Histories of Migration in the Lower Cross River Region.....	39
Chapter Three: Before Old Calabar: The Archaeology of the Cross River Region to ca. 1500 A. D.....	51
Chapter Four: Decorated Terracottas from Obot Okoho and Okang Mbang, ca. 1000 – 1450 A.D.....	69
Chapter Five: From Contact to Colonialism: Sources for Visual Culture of the Cross River Region During the Transatlantic Trade and the Rise of Old Calabar, ca. 1600 – 1885.....	87
Chapter Six: Cross River Visual Culture During Colonialism and the Modern Era, 1885 – Present.....	120
Chapter Seven: Calabar Terracottas: Preliminary Conclusions.....	150
Appendix: <i>Polyphemus africanus</i> and the Idea of Calabar: Constructions of Cross River History, ca. 1500-1985.....	162
Figures.....	193
References.....	345

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1	Map of the Cross River Region of Nigeria/Cameroon. Source: Nicklin and Salmons, "Cross River Art Styles.".....	194
Figure 1.2	Terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang, near Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria. D. 29.2 cm, H. 14.5 cm. Department of Art History and Archaeology, University of Maryland, courtesy of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	195
Figure 1.3	<i>Nsibidi</i> signs collected in the early twentieth century by J. K. Macgregor. Source: Macgregor, "Some Notes on Nsibidi.".....	196
Figure 1.4	Carved monoliths, Alok, Cross River State, Nigeria. The incised decoration is heightened with colored chalk in preparation for the 1991 New Yam Festival. Photograph courtesy of Ekpo Eyo.....	197
Figure 1.5	Radiocarbon dates for Calabar archaeological sites. Chart by Christopher Slogar.....	198
Figure 1.6	Woman at Calabar wearing print cloth with a pattern of conjoined arcs, the <i>nsibidi</i> sign for love or marriage. Photograph courtesy of Ekpo Eyo....	199
Figure 1.7	Procession of Igbo Leopard Society members wearing <i>ukara</i> cloth during the funeral of a fellow member in 1988. Note the opposed arcs decorating the man at center. Photograph by Eli Bantor. Source: Pirani and Smith, <i>The Visual Arts of Africa: Gender, Power, and Life Cycle Rituals</i>	199
Figure 3.1	Anthropomorphic terracotta figurine (Type II) from Akim Qua, Calabar. H. 19 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph courtesy of Ekpo Eyo.....	200
Figure 3.2	Two views of a partial terracotta globular vessel from the Cultural Center site excavated in 1978. D. 28.8 cm, H. 14 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photographs courtesy of Ekpo Eyo.....	201
Figure 3.3	Anthropomorphic terracotta figurine (Type I) from Abasi Edem Street, Calabar (1996). H. 25.3 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Old Residency Museum, Calabar, A.1996.ORC.1.1. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	202

Figure 3.4	The Old Marian Road site excavated by Ekpo Eyo in 1998. Note the many objects that are inverted or turned sideways. Photograph courtesy of Ekpo Eyo.....	203
Figure 3.5	Terracotta bowl from the Old Marian Road site, Calabar (1998). D. 31.1 cm, H. 15.6 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph courtesy of Ekpo Eyo.....	204
Figure 3.6	Terracotta jar from the Old Marian Road site, Calabar (1998). National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph courtesy of Ekpo Eyo.....	205
Figure 3.7	Terracotta headrest from the Old Marian Road site, Calabar (1998). National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph courtesy of Ekpo Eyo.....	206
Figure 3.8	The Abasi Edem site excavated by Ekpo Eyo in 1996. Note the crescentic layout of the artifact concentrations. Photograph courtesy of Ekpo Eyo.....	207
Figure 3.9	Detail of Concentration A (the uppermost of the three concentrations), Abasi Edem site. Note the inverted bowls. Photograph courtesy of Ekpo Eyo.....	207
Figure 3.10	A spoil heap at the looted site of Obot Okoho, 1997. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	208
Figure 3.11	Two terracotta bowls excavated by Ekpo Eyo at Oron. H. 5.5 cm and 9.5 cm (approximate). The interior rims are decorated with a repeating meander pattern and the bases were intentionally pierced before firing. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Oron Museum. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	209
Figure 3.12	Terracotta headrest excavated by Ekpo Eyo at Oron. H. 15 cm (approximate). National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Oron Museum. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	209
Figure 3.13	Terracotta vessel excavated by Thurstan Shaw at the Igbo-Jonah site, Igbo-Ukwu. H. 40.6 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, National Museum, Lagos. Source: Shaw, <i>Igbo-Ukwu</i>	210
Figure 4.1	Terracotta headrest from Okang Mbang. H. 13 cm, W. 11.7 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar, A.1997. ORC.2.77. Photographs by	

	Christopher Slogar.....	211
Figure 4.2	Two terracotta headrests from Okang Mbang. H. 13.5 cm, W. 11.7 cm (left); H. 12.3 cm, W. 11 cm (right). National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar, A.1997.ORB.2.86 (left), A.1997.ORB.2.85 (right). Photographs by Christopher Slogar.....	212
Figure 4.3	Five small terracotta bowls on pedestal bases. Note the variations in profile. From left: Okang Mbang, H. 4.76 cm, D. 8.3 cm; Okang Mbang, H. 7.0 cm, D. 8.1 cm; Okang Mbang, H. 6.4 cm, D. 14.3 cm; Okang Mbang, H. 7.3 cm, D. 14.1 cm; Obot Okoho, H. 9.8 cm, D. 16.5 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photographs by Christopher Slogar.....	213
Figure 4.4	Small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. H. 7.3 cm, D. 14.1 cm. Note the grooved and beaded decoration. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	214
Figure 4.5	Small terracotta bowl (underside) from Okang Mbang. H. 6.7 cm, D. 14.6 cm. This example features an interlace design on the body. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	214
Figure 4.6	Underside view of a small bowl from Okang Mbang showing termination of grooved elements as closed loops. H. 4.8 cm, D. 14 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	215
Figure 4.7	Underside view of a fragment of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. H. 7.9 cm, D. 15.9 cm (approximate). National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	216
Figure 4.8	Underside view of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. H. 2.9 cm, D. 11.1 cm. Note the cruciform arrangement of the four decorated panels. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	217
Figure 4.9	<i>Concentric circles</i> . Small (incomplete) terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. H. 7 cm, D. 14 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	218

- Figure 4.10 *Concentric circles*. Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. D. 12.7 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar...219
- Figure 4.11 *Concentric circles*. Underside view of a small (incomplete) terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. Note the interlace design on the body. H. 7.5 cm, D. 16.2 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....219
- Figure 4.12 *Concentric circles*. Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. H. 8.6 cm, D. 14 cm. Note the confronted arcs above and below the circles. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....220
- Figure 4.13 *Concentric circles*. Base of a small terracotta bowl attributed the Okang Mbang area. D. 18.2 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar, P.2002.ORC.A.1.3. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....220
- Figure 4.14 *Concentric circles*. Underside view of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. H. 5.9 cm, D. 15.6 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....221
- Figure 4.15 *Concentric circles*. Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang, D. 11.7 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar...221
- Figure 4.16 *Concentric circles*. Base from small terracotta bowl from Obot Okoho. D. 10.2 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar...222
- Figure 4.17 *Concentric circles*. Small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. H. 6.7 cm, D. 14.5 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar...223
- Figure 4.18 *Concentric circles*. Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. University of Maryland Department of Art History and Archaeology. Courtesy of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....224
- Figure 4.19 *Spiral*. Small terracotta bowl (incomplete) from Okang Mbang. H. 7 cm, D. 16.5 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar...225

Figure 4.20	<i>Spiral</i> . Small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. H. 7.3 cm, D. 14.1 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	226
Figure 4.21	<i>Spiral</i> . Fragment of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. H. 5.1 cm, D. 10.2 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	226
Figure 4.22	<i>Spiral</i> . Base from a small terracotta bowl from Obot Okoho. D. 14.3 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	227
Figure 4.23	<i>Spiral</i> . Small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. University of Maryland Department of Art History and Archaeology, Courtesy of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria. Photographs by Christopher Slogar.....	228
Figure 4.24	<i>Whorl</i> . Base from a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	229
Figure 4.25	<i>Interlace</i> . Small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. H. 6.5 cm, D. 17.5 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photographs by Christopher Slogar.....	230
Figure 4.26	<i>Interlace</i> . Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. D. 11.1 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	231
Figure 4.27	<i>Interlace</i> . Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. D. 10 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	232
Figure 4.28	<i>Interlace</i> . Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. D. 10.2 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	232
Figure 4.29	<i>Interlace</i> . Fragment of the base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. D. 8.3 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	233

Figure 4.30	<i>Interlace.</i> Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. D. 11.4 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	234
Figure 4.31	<i>Interlace.</i> Small (incomplete) terracotta bowl from Obot Okoho. H. 7.6 cm, D. 16.5 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	235
Figure 4.32	<i>Interlace.</i> Base of a small terracotta bowl from Obot Okoho. D. 11 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	235
Figure 4.33	<i>Interlace.</i> Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. D. 12.1 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	236
Figure 4.34	<i>Interlace.</i> Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. D. 12.1 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	236
Figure 4.35	<i>Interlace.</i> Base of a small terracotta bowl from Obot Okoho. D. 7.6 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	237
Figure 4.36	<i>Interlace.</i> Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. D. 13 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	237
Figure 4.37	<i>Interlace.</i> Base of a small terracotta bowl from Obot Okoho. D. 12.4 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	238
Figure 4.38	<i>Confronted Arcs/Angles.</i> Base of a small terracotta bowl from Obot Okoho. D. 12.4 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	239
Figure 4.39	<i>Confronted Arcs/Angles.</i> Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. D. 13.3 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	239
Figure 4.40	<i>Confronted Arcs/Angles.</i> Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. D. 11.7 cm. National Commission for Museums and	

	Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	240
Figure 4.41	<i>Confronted Arcs/Angles</i> . Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. D. 12.4 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	240
Figure 4.42	<i>Confronted Arcs/Angles</i> . Small (incomplete) terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. H. 7 cm, D. 17 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photographs by Christopher Slogar.....	241
Figure 4.43	<i>Confronted Arcs/Angles</i> . Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. D. 13.3 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	242
Figure 4.44	<i>Confronted Arcs/Angles</i> . Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. D. 10.6 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	242
Figure 4.45	<i>Opposed Arcs/Angles</i> . Base of a small terracotta bowl from Obot Okoho. D. 12.7 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar...	243
Figure 4.46	<i>Confronted Arcs/Angles</i> . Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. D. 11 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	243
Figure 4.47	<i>Opposed Arcs/Angles</i> . Base of a small terracotta bowl from Obot Okoho. D. 12.2 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar...	244
Figure 4.48	<i>Opposed Arcs/Angles</i> . Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. D. 11.4 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	244
Figure 4.49	<i>Opposed Arcs/Angles</i> . Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. D. 11.7 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	245

Figure 4.50	<i>Repeated Arcs/Angles.</i> Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. D. 11.7 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	246
Figure 4.51	<i>Repeated Arcs/Angles.</i> Base of a small terracotta bowl from Obot Okoho. D. 11 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar...	246
Figure 4.52	<i>Lozenge.</i> Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. D. 8.3 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	247
Figure 4.53	<i>Lozenge.</i> Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. D. 10.2 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	247
Figure 4.54	<i>Lozenge.</i> Base of a small terracotta bowl from Obot Okoho. D. 11.7 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	248
Figure 4.55	<i>Lozenge.</i> Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. D. 11.9 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	248
Figure 4.56	<i>Lozenge.</i> Base of a small terracotta bowl from Obot Okoho. D. 13.7 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	249
Figure 4.57	<i>Lozenge.</i> Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. D. 11 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	249
Figure 4.58	<i>Cruciform.</i> Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. D. 9.2 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	250
Figure 4.59	<i>Cruciform.</i> Base of a small terracotta bowl from Obot Okoho. D. 11.7 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	250
Figure 4.60	<i>Cruciform.</i> Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. D. 13.4 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	251

Figure 4.61	<i>Cruciform</i> . Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. D. 9.8 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	252
Figure 4.62	<i>Cruciform</i> . Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. D. 10.3 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	252
Figure 4.63	<i>Cruciform</i> . Base of a small terracotta bowl from Obot Okoho. D. 11.1 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	253
Figure 4.64	<i>Cruciform</i> . Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. D. 8.9 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	253
Figure 4.65	<i>Cruciform</i> . Small (incomplete) terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. H. 7.6 cm, D. 16.5 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photographs by Christopher Slogar.....	254
Figure 4.66	<i>Star</i> . Small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. H. 5.1 cm, D. 12.7 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photographs by Christopher Slogar.....	255
Figure 4.67	<i>Star</i> . Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. D. 11.4 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	256
Figure 4.68	<i>Star</i> . Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. D. 8.3 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	256
Figure 4.69	<i>Star</i> . Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. D. 8.3 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	257
Figure 4.70	<i>Central Straight Lines</i> . Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. D. 9.2 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	258

Figure 4.71	<i>Central Straight Lines.</i> Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. D. 7.6 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	258
Figure 4.72	<i>Central Straight Lines.</i> Base of a small terracotta bowl from Obot Okoho. D. 11.7 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar....	259
Figure 4.73	<i>Central Straight Lines.</i> Base of a small terracotta bowl from Obot Okoho. D. 14 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar....	259
Figure 4.74	<i>Central Straight Lines.</i> Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. D. 8.1 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	260
Figure 4.75	<i>Central Straight Lines.</i> Base of a small terracotta bowl from Obot Okoho. D. 12.7 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar....	260
Figure 4.76	<i>Central Straight Lines.</i> Underside view of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. H. 4.8 cm, D. 14 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photographs by Christopher Slogar.....	261
Figure 4.77	<i>Wavy Lines.</i> Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. D. 11.4 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	262
Figure 4.78	<i>Wavy Lines.</i> Base of a small terracotta bowl from the area of Okang Mbang. D. 8.7 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	262
Figure 4.79	<i>Wavy Lines.</i> Base of a small terracotta bowl from Obot Okoho. D. 15.6 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	263
Figure 4.80	<i>Wavy Lines.</i> Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. D. 8.6 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	263

- Figure 4.81 *Wavy Lines*. Small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. H. 7.1 cm, D. 2.7 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....264
- Figure 4.82 *Wavy Lines*. Small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. H. 7.1 cm, D. 2.7 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....265
- Figure 4.83 *Interwoven Lines*. Small terracotta bowl from Obot Okoho. H. 5.9 cm, D. 16.5 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar...266
- Figure 4.84 *Interwoven Lines*. Fragment a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. H. 4.8 cm, D. 8.9 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....267
- Figure 4.85 *Grid*. Base of a small terracotta bowl from Obot Okoho. D. 12.4 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....268
- Figure 4.86 *Filled Strip*. Base from a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. D. 12.7 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar...269
- Figure 4.87 *Filled Strip*. Base from a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. D. 11 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....269
- Figure 4.88 *Filled Strip*. Base from a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. D. 11.4 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar...270
- Figure 4.89 *Filled Strip*. Base from a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. D. 10.5 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar...270
- Figure 4.90 *Filled Strip*. Base from a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. D. 13.3 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar...271
- Figure 4.91 *Asymmetric Composite Designs*. Base from a small terracotta bowl from Obot Okoho. D. 12.7 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....272

Figure 4.92	<i>Asymmetric Composite Designs.</i> Underside view of a small terracotta bowl from Obot Okoho. H. 5.1 cm, D. 17.5 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	272
Figure 4.93	<i>Asymmetric Composite Designs.</i> Base from a small terracotta bowl from Obot Okoho. D. 13 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	273
Figure 4.94	<i>Asymmetric Composite Designs.</i> Base from a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. D. 9.5 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	273
Figure 4.95	<i>Bowls with interior decoration.</i> Reconstructed medium terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. H. 9.5 cm, D. 22 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photographs by Christopher Slogar.....	274
Figure 4.96	<i>Bowls with interior decoration.</i> Reconstructed medium terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. H. 8.1 cm, D. 17.9 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photographs by Christopher Slogar.....	275
Figure 4.97	Fragment of a large terracotta bowl from Obot Okoho. H. 9.8 cm, D. 20.3 cm. University of Maryland Department of Art History and Archaeology, Courtesy of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria. Photographs by Christopher Slogar.....	276
Figure 4.98	Fragment of a large terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. H. 11.4 cm, D. 24.1 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photographs by Christopher Slogar.....	277
Figure 4.99	Large terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. H. 8.3 cm, D. 21 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	278
Figure 4.100	Large terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. H. 14.4 cm, D. 29.2 cm. University of Maryland Department of Art History and Archaeology, courtesy of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria. Photographs by Christopher Slogar.....	279

Figure 4.101	Large terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang. H. 14.4 cm, D. 29.2 cm. University of Maryland Department of Art History and Archaeology, courtesy of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	280
Figure 4.102	Fragment of a jar from Okang Mbang (rim and base missing). University of Maryland Department of Art History and Archaeology, courtesy of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	281
Figure 4.103	Fragment of a terracotta jar from Okang Mbang. H. 14.6 cm, D. 7 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	282
Figure 4.104	Terracotta jar from Okang Mbang. H. 13.5 cm, D. 14.1 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar, A.1998.ORC.2.129. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	283
Figure 4.105	Terracotta jar from Okang Mbang. H. 33.5 cm, D. 15.2 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar, A.1998.ORC.2.129. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	284
Figure 4.105a	Terracotta jar from Okang Mbang. H. 33.5 cm, D. 15.2 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar, A.1998.ORC.2.129. Drawings by Leslie Brice and Pauline Savage, courtesy of Ekpo Eyo.....	285
Figure 4.106	Terracotta jar from Okang Mbang. H. 15.2 cm, D. 8.9 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar, A.1998.ORC.2.134. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	286
Figure 4.107	Terracotta jar from Okang Mbang. H. 16 cm, D. 24.4 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Drawings by Leslie Brice and Pauline Savage, courtesy of Ekpo Eyo.....	287
Figure 4.108	Terracotta jar from Okang Mbang. H. 30.8 cm, D. 12.1 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Drawings by Leslie Brice and Pauline Savage, courtesy of Ekpo Eyo.....	288

Figure 4.109	Terracotta jar from Okang Mbang. H. 23.8 cm, D. 16.5 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Drawings by Leslie Brice and Pauline Savage, courtesy of Ekpo Eyo.....	289
Figure 4.110	Terracotta jar from Okang Mbang. H. 21.4 cm, D. 10.2 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Drawings by Leslie Brice and Pauline Savage, courtesy of Ekpo Eyo.....	290
Figure 4.111	Terracotta jar from Okang Mbang. H. 21.6 cm, D. 10.8 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Drawings by Leslie Brice and Pauline Savage, courtesy of Ekpo Eyo.....	291
Figure 4.112	Terracotta jar from Okang Mbang. H. 23.5 cm, D. 16.9 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar, A.1997.ORB.2.99. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	292
Figure 4.113	Terracotta jar from Okang Mbang. H. 29.8 cm, D. 16.8 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Drawings by Suzanne Garrigues and Pauline Savage, courtesy of Ekpo Eyo.....	293
Figure 4.114	Terracotta jar from Okang Mbang. H. 26.4 cm, D. 14 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Drawings by Leslie Brice and Pauline Savage, courtesy of Ekpo Eyo.....	294
Figure 4.115	Terracotta jar from Okang Mbang. H. 23.5 cm, D. 12.7 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Drawings by Leslie Brice and Pauline Savage, courtesy of Ekpo Eyo.....	295
Figure 4.116	Terracotta jar from Okang Mbang. H. 27 cm, D. 16.5 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Drawings by Leslie Brice and Pauline Savage, courtesy of Ekpo Eyo.....	296
Figure 4.117	Pre-colonial iron currencies of southeastern Nigeria. “Needle” (top); “Hoe” (bottom). Source: Eyo, <i>Nigeria and the Evolution of Money</i>	297

Figure 4.118	Terracotta jar from Okang Mbang. H. 25 cm. University of Maryland Department of Art History and Archaeology, courtesy of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	298
Figure 4.119	Terracotta jar from Okang Mbang (detail: lower right). H. 25 cm. University of Maryland Department of Art History and Archaeology, courtesy of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	299
Figure 4.120	Terracotta jar from Okang Mbang (reverse). H. 25 cm. University of Maryland Department of Art History and Archaeology, courtesy of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	300
Figure 4.121	Anthropomorphic terracotta figurine (side view). Attributed to the Obot Okoho/Okang Mbang area. Collection of Barry and Toby Hecht. Photograph courtesy of The Art Gallery, University of Maryland.....	301
Figure 4.122	Anthropomorphic terracotta figurine from Okang Mbang. H. 30 cm, D. 19.2 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar, A.1997.ORB.2.94. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	302
Figure 4.123	Anthropomorphic terracotta figurine from Okang Mbang. H. 30 cm, D. 19.2 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar A.1997.ORB.2.94. Drawings by Suzanne Garrigues and Pauline Savage, courtesy of Ekpo Eyo.....	303
Figure 4.124	Anthropomorphic terracotta figurine from the Obot Okoho/Okang Mbang. H. 30 cm (approximate). Owner: Ekpo Eyo. Photograph by Christopher Slogar, courtesy of Ekpo Eyo.....	304
Figure 4.125	Detached head from an anthropomorphic terracotta figurine from Okang Mbang. H. 12 cm (approximate). University of Maryland Department of Art History and Archaeology, courtesy of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	305
Figure 4.126	Detached head from an anthropomorphic terracotta figurine from Obot Okoho. H. 12 cm (approximate). National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	305

Figure 4.127	Detached head from an anthropomorphic terracotta figurine from Oboto Okoho. H. 12 cm (approximate). National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	306
Figure 4.128	Detached head from an anthropomorphic terracotta figurine from Obot Okoho. H. 12 cm (approximate). National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	306
Figure 4.129	Detached head from an anthropomorphic terracotta figurine from Obot Okoho. H. 12 cm (approximate). National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	307
Figure 4.130	Detached head from an anthropomorphic terracotta figurine from Obot Okoho. H. 12 cm (approximate). National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	308
Figure 4.131	Detached head from an anthropomorphic terracotta figurine from Obot Okoho. H. 12 cm (approximate). National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	308
Figure 4.132	Eleven detached heads from anthropomorphic terracotta figurines from the Obot Okoho/Okang Mbang area, seized from looters. H. 6.5 cm – 11.1 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	309
Figure 4.133	Anthropomorphic terracotta figurine from Okang Mbang. H. 37 cm, D. 19.3 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar, A.1997.ORB.2.95. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	310
Figure 4.134	Terracotta female figurine. Odukpani area. H. 52 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	311
Figure 4.135	Terracotta female figurine. H. 52 cm. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	312

Figure 4.136	Terracotta female figurine (detail). National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	313
Figure 4.137	Calabar Efik maiden decorated with curvilinear, late 19 th / early 20 th century. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Old Residency Museum, Calabar. Source: <i>The Story of Old Calabar: A Guide to the National Museum at the Old Residency, Calabar</i>	314
Figure 5.1	Ivory horn. Attributed to the lower Cross River region, ca. 16 th century. L. 45 cm. Note the geometric decoration. Museo Nazionale, Ravenna. Source: Bassani, <i>African Art in Early European Collections</i>	315
Figure 5.2	Drawing of an ivory horn with added silver mounts and later carvings, including the date, 1599. Attributed to the lower Cross River region. L. 59 cm. The British Museum, London. Source: Bassani, <i>African Art in Early European Collections</i>	316
Figure 6.1	Ejagham pottery, early 20 th century. Source: Talbot, <i>In the Shadow of the Bush</i>	317
Figure 6.2	Ejagham pottery, early 20 th century. Source: Talbot, <i>In the Shadow of the Bush</i>	318
Figure 6.3	A scene of pottery used in a private ceremonial context. Probably Ibibio, early 20 th century. Source: M'Keown.....	319
Figure 6.4	Memorial shrine containing decorated pottery. Probably Ibibio, early 20 th century. Source: M'Keown.....	320
Figure 6.5	Anthropomorphic Terracotta Figurines. Igbo, early 20 th century. Source: Talbot, <i>The Peoples of Southern Nigeria</i> , v. II.....	321
Figure 6.6	Anthropomorphic terracotta figurines, <i>wiiso</i> . Yungur, Northeastern Nigeria, 1981. Source: Berns, "Ceramic Clues: Art History in the Gongola Valley.".....	322
Figure 6.7	Calabash cup with <i>nsibidi</i> decoration. H. 16.3 cm. Collected 1914 by P. A. Talbot. Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford, 1914.26.5. Drawing by Christopher Slogar.....	323
Figure 6.8	<i>Nsibidi</i> decoration of a calabash lid. D. 20. cm. Collected before 1914 by P. A. Talbot. Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford, 1914.26.1. Drawing by Christopher Slogar.....	324

Figure 6.9	Wood headdress in the form of a bird with <i>nsibidi</i> decoration. H. 16.3 cm. Collected in Oban District (Ejagham) before 1914 by P. A. Talbot, who associated it with the Leopard Society. Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford, 1914.26.6. Drawing by Christopher Slogar.....	325
Figure 6.10	Ink drawing by Heinrich Meinhard of a brass tray depicting a mermaid/ water spirit surrounded by <i>nsibidi</i> . M. D. W. Jeffreys collection (file 28), University Archives, University of the Witwatersrand. The tray itself (D.74.5 cm) was collected before 1942 by M. D. W. Jeffreys and is now in the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, 1942.13.1089. Image reproduced courtesy of Tom Meinhard and the Pitt Rivers Museum.....	326
Figure 6.11	<i>Nsibidi</i> signs collected in the early twentieth century by J. K. Macgregor. Source: Macgregor.....	327
Figure 6.12	<i>Nsibidi</i> signs collected in the upper Cross River area in the early twentieth century, by Alfred Mansfeld. Source: Mansfeld.....	328
Figure 6.13	Drawing of Ejagham women's body decoration, before 1912. Source: Talbot, <i>In the Shadow of the Bush</i>	329
Figure 6.14	Drawing of body art in southwest Cameroon, late nineteenth century. Source: Hutter.....	330
Figure 6.15	Leopard Society cloth, <i>ukara</i> . Igbo, twentieth century. H. 256.5 cm. UCLA Fowler Museum of Culural History, Los Angeles, X84-24. Source: Cole and Ross.....	331
Figure 6.16	Leopard Society cloth, <i>ukara</i> . Igbo, twentieth century. Collection of Barry and Toby Hecht. Photograph courtesy of The Art Gallery, University of Maryland.....	331
Figure 6.17	Young Efik Leopard Society initiates, Calabar. Source: Akak, <i>Efiks of Old Calabar</i> , v. IV.....	332
Figure 6.18	Procession of Igbo Leopard Society members wearing <i>ukara</i> cloth during the funeral of a fellow member in 1988. Note the cruciforms, circles, and arcs decorating the men escorting the masquerader. Photograph by Eli Bendor. Perani and Smith, <i>The Visual Arts of Africa: Gender, Power, and Life Cycle Rituals</i>	333
Figure 6.19	Ejagham Leopard Society meeting house, Ndebiji, upper Cross River area, before 1912. Note the elaborate decoration combining geometric designs with naturalistic images, as with <i>ukara</i> . Source: Talbot, <i>In the Shadow of the Bush</i>	334

Figure 6.20	Leopard Society emblem. Ejagham. H. 127 cm, W. 132 cm. Collection of Charles and Kent Davis. Source: Nicklin, “Emblem of the leopard spirit society.”.....	335
Figure 6.21	Widekum <i>Nchibi</i> masquerade. Upper Cross River area, before 1930. Source: Migeod.....	336
Figure 6.22	<i>Nnabo</i> masquerade, Calabar. Note the cowrie-shell geometric designs on the costumes. Photograph courtesy of Ekpo Eyo.....	337
Figure 6.23	Ejagham girls’ facial decoration with <i>nsibidi</i> . Upper Cross River region, before 1912. Source: Talbot, <i>In the Shadow of the Bush</i>	338
Figure 6.24	Ibibio wood figure of an <i>Mbopo</i> . Note the whorl design on the abdomen. Source: <i>Art of the Ibo, Ibibio, Ogoni</i>	339
Figure 6.25	<i>Nsibidi</i> on a calabash, used to record a trial at Mfamosing. Ejagham, upper Cross River area, before 1912. Source: Talbot 1912, <i>In the Shadow of the Bush</i>	340
Figure 7.1	Left: Copper-alloy figurine, n.d. Tiv, Benue River region, Nigeria. H. 15.5 cm. Ex-Collection Hubert Goldet. Source: <i>Collection Hubert Goldet</i> . Right: Anthropomorphic terracotta figurine from the Obot Okoho/Okang Mbang area (Figure 4.124). H. 30 cm (approximate). Owner: Ekpo Eyo. Photograph by Christopher Slogar.....	341
Figure A.1	Sapi-Portuguese Ivory Horn, ca. sixteenth century. Private Collection. L. 54 cm. Source: Bassani and Fagg.....	342
Figure A.2	Bini-Portuguese Ivory Saltcellar. H. 29.2 cm. The British Museum, London, Ethnography Department, inv. no. 78.11.1.48. Source: Bassani, <i>African Art and Artefacts in European Collections</i>	342
Figure A.3	Sebastian Münster, <i>Aethiopia</i> , published 1540. Source: Bagrow and Skelton.....	343
Figure A.4	<i>Aethiopia</i> (detail).....	343
Figure A.5	Map of the lower Cross River region. Source: Waddell.....	344
Figure A.6	Map of the lower Cross River region (detail, upper left).....	344

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Since the early 1990s, archaeological investigations organized by the University of Maryland Department of Art History and Archaeology and the Nigerian National Commission for Museums and Monuments, have yielded a large number of terracotta objects and other artifacts in and around the town of Calabar, Cross River State, in southeastern Nigeria (Fig. 1.1). Foremost among these finds are a large number of elaborately decorated terracottas in the form of vessels (Fig. 1.2), headrests, and anthropomorphic figurines, that were often found heaped together in large concentrations (Figs. 3.4, 3.8, 3.9). Their decoration includes geometric designs such as concentric circles, spirals, lozenges, cruciforms, arcs, angles, and interlaces, among many others. Of course, such designs are not unique to the Calabar area—they are in fact universal—but what is striking about them in the present context is their great numbers, their variety, the ways in which they are combined, and the great care taken to delineate them clearly, using consistent techniques.

This dissertation is an art historical study of a group of these decorated Calabar terracottas, most of which were found a few miles outside of Calabar municipal limits and which date to the period ca. 1000-1450 A.D. I have sought to discern meaning in them by incorporating an ethnoarchaeological approach into my art historical analysis, that is, I use information gathered from living cultures of the present and recent past to help shed light on the more distant past known through archaeology. Recognizing that this methodology carries a great potential for misuse, I have been mindful of the words of

art historian Marla Berns, who rightly maintains “the potential in such analogy depends on rigorous attention to the clustering of patterns and traits rather than on the exaggeration of random occurrences.”¹ Therefore, in order to relate the terracottas to the broader scope of history and visual culture of the Cross River region, I pursued several lines of inquiry, guided by certain questions. Namely, is there consistent evidence throughout the history of the region to account for such large groupings of ceramics placed on the ground or buried? And is there consistent evidence in the history of the region’s visual culture to account for the decoration of the archaeological material? With these questions in mind, I compared the terracottas with historically documented art forms and other aspects of visual culture, including ceramics, body decoration, architectural ornament, textiles, masquerade costumes, sculpture in wood and bronze, and ceremonial events. I examined the historical written record of Calabar and the Cross River region, which begins with Portuguese accounts written in the early sixteenth century. I studied the local histories of various Cross River peoples, many of which have been published in recent decades. During my research in the Calabar area in 1996, 1997, 1999, 2002, and 2004, I participated in several archaeological excavations conducted by Ekpo Eyo and studied the terracottas and other objects conserved in the Nigerian National Museums at Calabar, Oron, and Lagos. I also examined public and private collections of archival material and objects in the United States and Great Britain. The results of this work indicate that despite the inevitable changes the visual culture of the Cross River region has undergone over the last thousand years, it retains a significant

¹ Marla Berns, “Ceramic Arts in Africa,” *African Arts* 22, 2 (1989), 35.

degree of continuity, particularly as it concerns the kinds of decoration found on the terracottas and the specific contexts in which the terracottas have been found. There are in fact modern parallels to the decoration of these terracottas, though they are by no means limited to the ceramic medium.

Considered together, the various geometric motifs used in decorating the terracottas constitute an iconography markedly similar to the ideographic script generally referred to as *nsibidi* in written sources (the *nsibiri* of the Ejagham and neighboring groups). *Nsibidi*, comprised of various discrete signs including arcs, angles, cruciforms, circles, spirals, lozenges, and interlaces, among many others, is indigenous to the Cross River region (Fig. 1.3). While its usage has declined significantly since first discussed in Western sources in the early twentieth century, it is still maintained within certain institutions. *Nsibidi* is a polyvalent sign system having performative (i.e. mimed)² and graphic components (i.e. written signs), while certain objects may also be considered *nsibidi*. The meanings for particular signs may vary geographically and according to one's level of initiation in the societies that use *nsibidi*, such as the women's Ekpa Society of the Ejagham, or the men's Leopard Society (variously called Ekpe, Mgbe, or Ngbe—the pidgin Egbo of older written sources), which is the traditional ruling body throughout the Cross River region. Graphic *nsibidi* may appear on portable objects (e.g. wooden fans and figure carvings, instruments, calabashes, brass basins, masquerade paraphernalia, textiles); architecture (e.g. Leopard Society meeting houses); and the human body (e.g. tattoos, scarifications, or painted designs). Sometimes graphic *nsibidi*

² See Malcolm Ruel, *Leopards and Leaders: Constitutional Politics Among a Cross River People* (London: Tavistock, 1969), 213-232; Robert Farris Thompson, *African Art in Motion* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1974), 180-182.

is meant to be transient, simply incised on the ground surface to be erased during the performance of a ritual; or drawn in chalk on the sides of houses and left vulnerable to the rains.³ In light of the great diversity of languages and ethnicities in the Cross River region, the historian O. E. Uya maintains that the “unifying influence [of *nsibidi*] within the Cross River region is no longer debatable.”⁴ This is a key point that I will return to throughout this study as it helps to explain not only why *nsibidi* is found all over the Cross River region today, but why it (and other similar designs) run so deeply through its historical record as well.

T. D. Maxwell drew attention to *nsibidi* in a Nigerian colonial government report of 1905.⁵ Several more studies by colonial officers followed and these have been important source material for subsequent research.⁶ The history of *nsibidi* remains

³ J. K. Macgregor, “Some Notes on *Nsibidi*,” *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 39 (1909), 212.

⁴ O.E. Uya, “History, Culture, and Unity in the Cross River Region,” in ed. M. B. Abasiattai, *The Role of the Arts in Nation Building* (Calabar: Map Publishers in association with University of Calabar, 1987), 42.

⁵ See Macgregor, 210.

⁶ See Alfred Mansfeld, *Urwald-Dokumente* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 1908): esp taf. IV, V; Macgregor, 209-219; E. Dayrell, “Some ‘Nsibidi’ Signs,” *Man* 67 (1910), 113-115; E. Dayrell, “Further Notes on ‘Nsibidi’ Signs With Their Meanings From Ikom District, Southern Nigeria,” *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 41 (1911), 521-543; P. A. Talbot, *In the Shadow of the Bush* (New York: George H. Doran, 1912): esp. “Nsibidi Signs,” 448-461; M. D. W. Jeffreys, “Correction: MAN, 1910 67 (Nsibidi Writing),” *MAN* (September-October, 1964), no. 192. Important later works include: Basil Amaeshi, “Sources for West African Studies: Some Non-Alphabetic Writings of West Africa,” *Libri: International Library Review* 27,1 (1977), 1-8; Simon Battestini, “*Nsibidi*,” in ed. Simon Ottenberg, *The Nsukka Artists and Nigerian Contemporary Art* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian National Museum of African Art, 2002), 63-83; Simon Battestini, “Reading Signs of Identity and Alterity: History, Semiotics and a Nigerian Case,” *African Studies Review* 43, 1 (1991), 99-116; Kenneth Campbell, “Nsibidi Update,” *Arts d’Afrique Noire* 47 (1988), 33-46; Amanda Carlson, *Nsibiri, Gender, and Literacy: The Art of the Bakor-Ejagham (Cross River State, Nigeria)* (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 2003); O. Kalu, “Writing in Pre-Colonial Africa: A Case Study of Nsibidi,” in ed. O. Kalu, *African Cultural Development* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1980), 76-83; Gerhard Kubik, “African Graphic Systems with particular reference to the Benue-Congo or <<Bantu>> languages zone,” *MUNTU: Revue scientifique et culturelle du CICIBA* 4-5 (1986), 71-135; Ute Röschenhaler, *Die Kunst der Frauen: Zur Komplementarität von Nacktheit und Maskierung bei den Ejagham im Südwesten Kameruns* (Berlin:

subject to speculation, however, in part, because of the secrecy maintained by its most prominent custodian, the men's Leopard Society, whose members are forbidden to discuss the full meanings of *nsibidi* with outsiders.

Early evidence of *nsibidi* is found in the decoration of the carved monoliths of Emangabe, near Ikom in the upper Cross River region. The stones frequently display carefully rendered concentric circles, spirals, lozenges, and other discrete figures otherwise associated with body art and *nsibidi* in various contexts (1.4).⁷ Within a circle of these stones, Ekpo Eyo obtained a sample of charcoal, which by means of radiocarbon testing yielded a date of 1750 +/- 50 B.P., that is 120-220 A.D.—but Eyo himself expressed serious reservations over this date because it is only a single result.⁸ On the other hand, Eyo later noted that a radiocarbon date associated with similar carved stones at nearby Alok supported Philip Allison's sixteenth-century dating based on local oral traditions.⁹

The Calabar terracottas, found at the other end of the Cross River basin, offer additional early evidence of *nsibidi*. And while the monolith chronology may be viewed with a certain degree of skepticism—the two such widely divergent results offer no reliable chronology—there are now five radiocarbon dates from Calabar and two from

VWB, 1993); Robert Farris Thompson, *African Art in Motion* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974), 173-241; Robert Farris Thompson, "Black Ideographic Writing: Calabar to Cuba," *Yale Alumni Magazine* 42, 2 (1978), 29-33; Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), chapter five, "Emblems of Prowess; Ejagham Art and Writing in Two Worlds," 227-268.

⁷ For example, see Carlson, 135-172.

⁸ Ekpo Eyo, "Alok and Emangabe stone monoliths: Ikom, Cross River State of Nigeria," in ed. Ezio Bassani, *Arte in Africa* (Modena: Edizioni Panini, 1986), 103.

⁹ Ekpo Eyo, "Carved monolith (*atal*)," in ed. Tom Philips, *Africa: The Art of a Continent* (New York and Munich: Prestel, 1995), 374.

the nearby village of Okang Mbang that generally corroborate each other, and which are associated with hundreds of terracottas that display a considerable range of designs.

Combined, the dates encompass the period ca. 450 A.D – 1440 A.D (Fig. 1.5).

While the dates are to a large degree sequential, the radiocarbon dating technique yields a range of dates for each sample. When considered together, the individual Calabar results overlap significantly. For example, all five urban Calabar dates overlap in the eighth century, while two of them extend into the eleventh century, where the two Okang Mbang dates begin. Both Okang Mbang dates then correspond until the turn of the fourteenth century. Thus, if what the archaeological evidence strongly suggests—that *nsibidi* is indeed a modern iteration of the iconography found on the terracottas—then *nsibidi* is much older, even more complex, and was distributed over a broader area than previously considered. In short, there is now physical evidence that *nsibidi* was already a sophisticated phenomenon fifteen hundred years ago! This is remarkable in light of what is currently known about indigenous scripts in sub-Saharan Africa and, therefore, these objects further (and strongly) refute the idea that Africans had no writing until the arrival of Europeans. If modern practices are anything to go by, these signs were not just found on ceramics, but also appeared on wood sculptures, calabashes, textiles, earthen architecture, and the human body, to name just a few examples that would not be expected to survive in the archaeological record of a tropical area such as Calabar.

But *nsibidi* is not equivalent to Western scripts. It is neither standardized nor alphabetic, and there is apparently no grammar that governs its usage. Thus, the meaning of a particular sign may change by location as well as one's level of initiation in a group that uses it. Furthermore, designs considered to be *nsibidi* in one particular area may not

necessarily be considered so in another. While some aspects of *nsibidi* are public knowledge and widely recognized, its deeper, more esoteric meanings are often kept secret by the various local societies that employ it. Therefore, in terms of published research, what is known about the specifics of interpretation of *nsibidi* signs, i.e. “reading” them, is made problematic because of their polyvalent nature and the secrecy surrounding their meaning, as used by men’s associations in particular. However, it is telling that Amanda Carlson, in her doctoral dissertation on the implications of *nsibidi* usage among the Ejagham, describes fluency with such signs as literacy.¹⁰ Thus, *nsibidi* as a symbolic system should be considered on its own terms—however inadequately they may be currently understood by outsiders—and not as a “primitive” form of writing defined in the Western sense. *Nsibidi* is discussed further in Chapters Five and Six.

The dating of the terracottas is made more significant by the fact that there is virtually no information about Calabar prior to the arrival of Europeans, the first written evidence of which dates to the mid-seventeenth century. Indeed, the very founding of Calabar was long attributed to the arrival of Europeans and the trade they initiated, at least until local oral histories began to be studied in earnest in the latter twentieth century (for example, the historian Kannan Nair wrote in 1972, “The arrival of the Efik at Calabar coincided with a boom in the slave trade”¹¹). These histories generally place the three major ethnic groups of Calabar—the Efik, Qua, and Efut, respectively—in the area some time before the arrival of Europeans, but the chronologies involved remain contentiously debated among them. Thus, the archaeological finds carry the potential to

¹⁰ See Carlson.

¹¹ Kannan Nair, *Politics and Society in Southeastern Nigeria* (London: Frank Cass, 1972), 4.

verify (or dispute) the claims asserted in these oral histories. However, considering their great age, it would be irresponsible at this time to assign the terracottas to any of the ethnic groups living in Calabar today, considering the processual nature of ethnic identity. In any case, despite the early publications that attribute such works to the Qua, additional finds have since been made in what are now Efut areas and elsewhere, which casts doubt on a strictly Qua attribution. So here, I prefer to use the term “Calabar terracottas” as a general descriptor indicating only the geographic region of their discovery. While I also use this term to differentiate the archaeological material from modern wares, I do so only for purposes of clarity—the ancient material appears not to be appreciably different from pottery made in the region today in terms of construction, firing technique, or fabric, though I say this based on visual evidence only, as no materials analyses have been done. What really distinguishes the archaeological material, however, is the variety of its remarkable decoration. For this, there really is no good contemporary comparison.

It is important to note that for my description of terracottas in Chapter Four, I have chosen to focus upon a specific group of decorated pieces. In other words, I have not attempted a complete typology of all Calabar ceramics, which would have included certain kinds of vessels that are largely undecorated and those that are decorated only in a rudimentary manner. It is not that I consider such works insignificant. Rather, I maintain they are significant in different ways that are beyond the scope of this dissertation. Thus, I have chosen to focus here on the objects displaying the kinds of discrete designs that correspond to a broad current of Cross River visual culture related to *nsibidi*. They constitute a major portion of Calabar terracottas, but do not account for all of them. As

an art historian, I am interested in why *some* of the terracottas are decorated in certain ways and not others (or not at all). Why did the potters who made them consider it necessary to decorate certain pieces very extravagantly while others were more simply designed or even left plain?

Furthermore, it is important to note that, in some cases, these objects were found in disturbed archaeological contexts or contexts that make determining their social significance difficult. One of the main sites discussed here, for example, was evidently a pottery production center and so the ultimate uses of objects found there is not apparent (though similar objects found in other contexts do help with this issue). Thus, some questions are beyond the scope of this dissertation and may only be addressed through continued archaeological investigation. I may raise more questions here than can be answered at present, but the archaeology of Calabar is still in an early state. At present, I am more interested in addressing the broader implications of the significance of the Calabar terracottas within the history of the Cross River region, because even though their makers and users are not yet known, they foreshadow a major element of visual culture shared by many Cross River peoples to this day—*nsibidi*.

Calabar: Historical Background

Calabar overlooks the Calabar River, which feeds into the Cross River, a major waterway that has long been an important conduit for trade and other means of cultural contact throughout a vast tropical basin encompassing 26,000 square miles of eastern

Nigeria and western Cameroon.¹² The Calabar River also offers a secure port for seafaring vessels, and this combination of safe harbor and ready access to a large inland market made the region very appealing to European traders. James Barbot, in a famous account dating from the early 1700s, stated that the “Old Calabar river . . . was easily known from the sea, and as easy to be navigated by large ships. It is well furnish’d with villages and hamlets all about, where Europeans drive their trade with the Blacks . . .”¹³

Surviving evidence indicates that by the 1660s if not earlier, Europeans had established commerce in the lower Cross River. As shown by Edwin Ardener,¹⁴ by that time the ancestors of today’s Efik people likely had established settlements there and had developed a trading infrastructure to support their fishing economy. Thus, these groups were ideally positioned to gain control of the new flow of European trade into and out of the Cross River, and they benefited greatly from their partnerships with the European merchant sailors. Efik settlements near the juncture of the Calabar and Cross rivers prospered and became regionally powerful city-states—primarily Creek Town (Ikot Etunko), Cobham Town, Old Town (Obutong), Henshaw Town (Nsidung), and Duke Town (Atakpa)—that were at times bitter rivals. Their political leadership was based on

¹² A. E. Ntukidem, “The Land and People of the Cross River Region,” in ed. Monday Abasiattai, *A History of the Cross River Region of Nigeria* (Enugu: Harris Publishers in association with University of Calabar Press, 1990), 5.

¹³ James Barbot, *Description of the countries and territories of Calbary . . .*, in eds. P. E. H. Hair, Adam Jones, and Robin Law, *Barbot on Guinea: The Writings of Jean Barbot on West Africa 1678-1712*, vol. II (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1992), 677.

¹⁴ Edwin Ardener, “Documentary and Linguistic Evidence for the Rise of the Trading Polities between Rio del Rey and Cameroons, 1500-1650,” in ed. I. M. Lewis, *History and Social Anthropology* (London, 1968; reprint in ed. Shirley Ardener, *Kingdom on Mount Cameroon: Studies in the History of the Cameroon Coast, 1500-1970*, Providence: Berghahn Books, 1996), 20; A. J. H. Latham, *Old Calabar 1600-1891* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 10.

the traditional Efik “house” system of patrilineal descent through the founding family. These often-competing Efik polities, and to some extent their hinterlands, were known collectively as Old Calabar until 1904, when “Old” was dropped. During the eighteenth century, the Efiks developed a monopoly over the Cross River trade. Consequently, Old Calabar gained international recognition as a major port, particularly in the context of the transatlantic slave trade. After the slave trade was abolished in the early nineteenth century, palm oil became the major export. Calabar later became the seat of the British colonial government in Southern Nigeria and is today the capital of Cross River State.

While the history of these Efik polities over the last few hundred years is well known, due largely to the many surviving merchant records and related accounts (including some eighteenth century documents written by Efiks¹⁵), there is virtually nothing known about the town’s earlier history, that is, before European contact. Because of this, some writers conflated the institution of the slave trade at Calabar with its foundation, a view epitomized in the mid-nineteenth century by Thomas Hutchinson, Her Majesty’s Consul for the Bight of Biafra, and Rev. Hope Waddell, who to this day remains a revered figure in Calabar (the secondary school named in his honor is but one testament to his popularity). Hutchinson claimed the Efik came to Calabar “to carry on the slave trade,” while Waddell similarly reported the Efik wanted “to get near the

¹⁵ See the extracts from the diary of Efik trader Antera Duke reproduced in ed. Daryll Forde, *Efik Traders of Old Calabar* (London: Dawsons, 1968), 79-115. See also Paul E. Lovejoy and David Richardson, “Letters of the Old Calabar Slave Trade 1760-1789,” in eds. Vincent Carretta and Philip Gould *Genius in Bondage: Literature of the Early Black Atlantic* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2001), 89-115; Randy J. Sparks, *The Two Princes of Calabar: An Atlantic Odyssey from Slavery to Freedom* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2004).

European ships engaged in the slave trade.”¹⁶ According to Nigerian historian A. E. Afigbo, “Nobody has ever questioned the truth of either the former or the latter assertion, in fact they have been ‘accepted’ as correct interpretations of this particular period of Efik history.”¹⁷

The views espoused by Waddell and Hutchinson are, however, not too surprising considering the level of historical knowledge available to them and, more importantly, their positions vis-à-vis the beginnings of British colonial empire in West Africa. What is surprising, however, is that as late as 1957, just three years shy of Nigerian independence, a popular history of the Church of Scotland mission—founded in Calabar in 1846—loudly echoed their sentiments. This work, Rev. Donald McFarlan’s *Calabar*, bluntly restores the European pre-colonial view of Calabar’s past embraced by Waddell and Hutchinson: “The early story of Calabar,” he wrote, “is a story of black bondage.”¹⁸

Clearly McFarlan assumed that Calabar had no significant history prior to the slave trade—that is, if it even existed at all. Considered metaphorically, the statement references the native “heathenism” missionaries struggled so mightily to overcome. Hence McFarlan’s statement is not merely an historical reference to Calabar, but serves

¹⁶ Thomas Hutchinson, *Impressions of Western Africa* (London, 1858; reprint London: Frank Cass, 1970), 129; Hope Waddell, *Twenty-Nine Years in the West Indies and Central Africa* (London, 1863; reprint, London: Frank Cass, 1970), 309.

¹⁷ A. E. Afigbo, “Efik Origins and Migrations Reconsidered,” *Nigeria Magazine* 87 (1965), 278.

¹⁸ Donald McFarlan, *Calabar*, rev. ed. (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1957). The first edition of this work was published in 1946. The equating of native religion in the Cross River area to bondage is also found in William J. Ward, *In and Around the Oron Country, or the Story of Primitive Methodism in Southern Nigeria* (London: W. A. Hammond, 1913), 35: “The principal chief of Arsibong Town was Asuquo, one of the most level-headed, dignified, and intelligent heathen I ever met, yet juju held him in bondage.”

implicitly to vindicate British colonialism in Africa as a civilizing mission. In this, McFarlan was certainly not alone.

The Significance of the Calabar Terracottas

The archaeological finds reveal the inadequacy of such claims about the founding of Calabar by providing physical evidence of sophisticated human activity in the area centuries before Europeans arrived. While further testing is certainly called for, it is already apparent the finds have extended the story of Calabar over a thousand years into the past. Examination of this material, therefore, opens a number of important questions concerning the early situation of Calabar and how it relates to Calabar's known past and present: Who were these early Calabarians? Are they related to the present populations and if so, how? What was the significance of the archaeological material to them? Why did the terracottas apparently go out of production by the sixteenth century?

These objects were typically found in archaeological contexts suggestive of ritual importance, including what are thought to be shrines and human burials. The sites are often located in the hinterland areas now occupied by the Qua and Efut peoples, who trace their origins to what is now southwestern Cameroon. Yet the Qua and Efut peoples are infrequently mentioned in texts about Calabar written prior to the twentieth century, because, the Efik would not allow Europeans access to the hinterland in order to protect their trading monopoly. On this point, James Broom Walker remarked in 1877 that "exploration is difficult on account of the reluctance of the Calabar tribe [i.e. Efiks] to

permit Europeans to enter the country.”¹⁹ Consequently, oral traditions have been crucial to understanding the early histories of the Qua and Efut peoples.

The Qua maintained a rich ceramic tradition until the Nigerian Civil War effectively ended it. Yet, Qua oral histories as currently understood place them at Calabar only toward the end of the period so far identified with the terracotta finds. The Efik have no history of pottery-making, which is made clear by their saying, “*Ibotke abang esio inua*,” (literally, “You don’t bring out the mouth of the pot”²⁰), meaning Efiks don’t know how to mold pots well enough to form the mouth (i.e. finish them). The Efut, for their part, may be associated with one pottery-making center at Nkpara village, though the practice apparently died out there by the early twentieth century, considering its absence from historical sources since then.

Ekpo Eyo attributes the general lack of pottery production among the Efik and Efut to their traditional occupations, which centered on the catching and processing of fish and shrimp—activities that require a more or less nomadic lifestyle not suitable to pottery production. The agriculturalist heritage of the Qua people, on the other hand, required a more settled lifestyle that fostered the production of pottery. A similar situation evidently held on the other side of the Cross River at Oron, whose residents, primarily fishers themselves, imported pottery made by their agriculturist neighbors, the Nsit.²¹

¹⁹ James Broom Walker, “Notes on the Politics, Religion, and Commerce of Old Calabar,” *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* VI (1877), 124.

²⁰ I thank Ekpo Eyo for this translation.

²¹ See Efiog E. B. Edunam, “Oron Pre-Colonial Economy,” in Okon Edet Uya, *A History of Oron People* (Oron: Manson, 1984), 78.

However, as I explain below, several other groups now resident in various parts of the Cross River region claim to have occupied the Calabar area in the distant past before migrating to their present locations. In fact, until modern times, periodic migration was characteristic of many Cross River peoples who from time to time sought better areas for farming, hunting, or fishing, or were forced away by more powerful rivals. Thus, the Calabar area likely hosted many different groups throughout its history, groups whose identities and composition changed and developed over time. For these reasons, it would be premature at this time to identify any particular modern group with the excavated material. It is clear, however, that despite the current anonymity of their makers and consumers, the finds have much in common with the broader visual culture of the Cross River region, much of which is widely shared because of the trading networks facilitated by the Cross River and its tributaries.

Calabar Terracottas: Links to the Present

The terracottas are often embellished with a variety of carefully rendered geometric designs, including concentric circles, spirals, arcs, lozenges, cruciform shapes, and interlace patterns, among others. The potters decorated each object in a unique fashion, while maintaining a fairly consistent style of impressed decoration, usually created through a combination of stippling, incising, combing, and rouletting techniques, but which occasionally features attached elements. Often the decoration consists of subtly different variations of similar designs, but a preference for creating uniquely designed objects, rather than multiple duplicates of the same pattern (which of course

would have been easier and faster), is a characteristic of the Calabar terracottas. The pots' function apparently has much to do with this: highly decorated terracottas are often associated with ritual sites, whereas plainer (and stronger) pots suitable for daily domestic use were found in habitation areas.²² The uniqueness of each piece, furthermore, certainly attests to the artists' creativity and aesthetic sensibilities.

The terracottas' distinctive patterning is a key element linking the terracottas with the modern visual culture of the Cross River region. In particular, many of the designs show a remarkable affinity to graphic *nsibidi* and I contend that the designs on the terracottas provide evidence of a knowledge system akin to it, if not its actual precursor. Like *nsibidi* signs, the terracotta decorations apparently held further significance apart from their ornamental qualities. As such, they constitute important physical evidence of cultural continuity in the usage of sign systems. This is not, however, to be mistaken for cultural stasis, or the defunct concept of the "ethnographic present."

Literal "reading" or interpretation of the terracottas may never be possible, especially considering that modern knowledge of *nsibidi* is often not public knowledge. Thus, we will probably never know the designs' original significance, but that is not really the point here. What I will attempt to demonstrate is that the designs are related to *nsibidi* not just superficially but also in the circumstances of their use, their context. The presence of such signs on a pot (or a cloth or the human body) transformed it into something significantly different, not unlike the way the sign of the Christian cross brings new meaning to anything on which it is placed. We happen to have many decorated

²² See Violetta Ekpo, "New Archaeological Materials from Calabar, Nigeria," *The Nigerian Field* 42, 4 (1977), 19.

terracottas because that medium can withstand being buried in the earth for many years. Yet I believe, if modern history is any guide, many other kinds of objects were decorated similarly but have not withstood the rigors of time. The terracottas also suggest that people decorated their bodies as they did their pots, which is not unusual in sub-Saharan Africa even today. Thus, what I am suggesting is that regardless of the particular surface on which they appear—in this case pottery—the designs themselves constitute an important and enduring aspect of Cross River visual culture, one that offers valuable insight into histories not otherwise recorded. The fact that so much decorated pottery survived positively demonstrates that the designs were given great prominence by the people who made and used the terracottas. The ceramic medium also points to strong association with gender, considering that pottery in southeastern Nigeria is made exclusively by women.²³ This also runs counter the contemporary situation at Calabar, where *nsibidi* is primarily associated with the men's Leopard Society—but this was absolutely not the case historically, as will be shown.

The Present Study in the Historiography of Cross River Arts

Previous studies of Cross River arts have rightly focused on the shared or similar institutions found throughout the region that have been the primary patrons of the arts since the time inquiries were first made (i.e. since the latter nineteenth century, but especially since the early twentieth). Such institutions include age-grade associations, the women's "fattening house" (in which young women, in isolation from the larger

²³ See Marla Berns, "Art, history, and gender: women and clay in West Africa," *The African Archaeological Review* 11 (1993), 129-148.

society, learned the skills necessary for adult life and in so doing brought prestige to their families²⁴), and various other cult groups and societies devoted to warfare, the maintenance of social and spiritual relationships, and the exercising of political power.

With a few notable exceptions, there are not many written sources prior to the nineteenth century from which to write the art history of sub-Saharan Africa. So it is crucial to keep in mind that what many still consider “classical” African art is that which happened to be current at the time Europeans began collecting in earnest during the latter nineteenth century and which conformed to European precepts of art, the apex being (mimetic) figurative painting and sculpture. Thus, figurative sculpture in Africa attracted a great deal of attention while non-figurative media, and particularly the textiles and ceramic vessels made by women, were relegated to the status of minor arts or crafts and so were largely ignored by researchers until fairly recently.²⁵ Furthermore, organic objects such as locally-made woodcarvings and textiles, which were much more common before colonialism and Christian missionary successes, are virtually non-existent in the archaeological record of sub-tropical Africa because they readily decompose. Thus, while there is an increasingly good understanding of Cross River art of the present day and recent past, it is not surprising that a diachronic survey of the region’s art has yet to be undertaken.

The present study is an attempt to address this rather broader narrative. The new archaeological evidence allowed me to consider a long period of time, extending into the

²⁴ See Jill Salmons, “Fat is Beautiful,” *Art Links* (September, 1981), 23-25.

²⁵ Berns, “Art, history, and gender: women and clay in West Africa.”

past long before Europeans first arrived on the scene. But contrary to most studies of Cross River arts, this one is necessarily focused on visuality rather than the particulars of social context and patronage. This is because, given the still-nascent state of archaeology in the Cross River region, one cannot know what particular institutions were associated with excavated objects, or whether in fact variants of present-day institutions even existed during the period the Calabar terracottas were in use. Therefore, I have focused on the internal evidence from the material itself and, when possible, the archaeological context in which it was found. To this I compared evidence culled from over three hundred years of written history, including local oral traditions documented since the latter nineteenth century. What I found demonstrates a striking correspondence between the decoration and use of the Calabar terracottas and the modern visual culture of the Cross River region broadly conceived.

While at Calabar the archaeological evidence for the designs is so far limited to the terracotta medium, other sites in the Cross River region yielded comparable decoration carved in stone (mentioned previously, Fig. I.4). Some examples are also known in cuprous metal,²⁶ thereby demonstrating the applicability of the designs across various media in the distant past. As with the Calabar terracottas, these works also feature as subject matter decorated anthropomorphic figures, thus further suggesting that human bodies were ornamented in similar ways.

But more to the point, the practice of using similar motifs throughout a variety of media is also a modern hallmark of *nsibidi* as well as similar designs not always

²⁶ Keith Nicklin, "Statuette masculine," in *Arts du Nigeria* (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1997), 166-168.

described as such, which is why I will examine not only terracottas, but also textiles, architectural decoration, portable objects, and body arts practiced by men and women in the Cross River region. Whether incised, carved, pyro-engraved, punched, sewn, dyed, drawn, or painted, the motifs constitute an iconography that transcends both time and ethnicity—an important consideration in a region diverse in languages and cultures, yet interconnected through trade. Focusing primarily on such a central and widespread aspect of visual culture seems to me a promising way to begin a comprehensive and diachronic art history of the region.

Many of the published works that were crucial to this study were written during the colonial period in the first half of the twentieth century. By far the most prolific colonial-era writer on the Cross River region was Percy Amaury Talbot (1877-1945), an officer in the British colonial government in Southern Nigeria. His published books include *In the Shadow of the Bush* (1912) on the Ekoi (Ejagham), *Life in Southern Nigeria* (1923) on the Ibibio, and the four-volume ethnographic survey, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria* (1926), as well as a number of articles in scholarly and popular journals. Dorothy Amaury Talbot, his wife, wrote an important study of the culture of Ibibio women, *Woman's Mysteries of a Primitive People* (1915). Charles Partridge, an Assistant District Commissioner in the Nigerian colonial government, published *Cross River Natives* on the Ejagham (1905). M. D. W. Jeffreys, a Senior District Officer in Nigeria, wrote *Old Calabar and Notes on the Ibibio Language* (1935) and many scholarly articles. Working for the German colonial government of Cameroon, Alfred Mansfeld authored *Urwald-Dokumente* (1908) about the eastern Ejagham. I must not fail to mention Kenneth Murray, who founded the Nigerian Antiquities Service (the precursor of

today's National Commission for Museums and Monuments), as well as the Oron Museum. Murray authored a number of important articles and the manuscript on which Keith Nicklin later based his book, *Ekpu: The Oron Ancestor Figures of South Eastern Nigeria* (1999).

A listing of the major modern studies of Cross River arts would include works by Philip Allison; Suzanne Blier; Robert Brain; Kenneth Campbell; Amanda Carlson; Christa Clarke; Ekpo Eyo; Rosemary Harris; G. I. Jones; Sidney Kasfir; Hans-Joachim Koloss; John Messenger; Keith Nicklin; Simon Ottenberg; Ute Röschenhaler; Jill Salmons; Robert Farris Thompson; and Marcilene Wittmer.²⁷ Onyile Bassey Onyile and Gitti Salami are currently finishing dissertations on the arts of the Oron and Yakurr peoples, respectively.²⁸

Arts Across Cultures in the Cross River Region

While the peoples of the Cross River region are very diverse in terms of their origin histories, languages spoken, and the specifics of artistic expression (e.g. dance styles or mask forms), they have and continue to share many key aspects of culture, and more particularly visual culture, because of their long history of interaction along the

²⁷ See the 1984 special issue of *African Arts* devoted to Cross River studies (vol. 28, no. 1), which contains extensive bibliographic information. For additions to the literature since then, see, Ute Röschenhaler, *Die Kunst der Frauen: Zur Komplementarität von Nacktheit und Maskierung bei den Ejagham im Südwesten Kameruns* (Berlin: VWB, 1993) and Amanda Carlson, Nsibiri, *Gender, and Literacy: The Art of the Bakor-Ejagham (Cross River State, Nigeria)* (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Indiana, 2003). Keith Nicklin's full bibliography is included in Philip Peek and Barry Hallen, "Keith Nicklin (1946-2002): Who was that Masked Man?," *African Arts* 35, 4 (2002), 12-13, 91.

²⁸ Gitti Salami, *Ordinarily Extraordinary: Yakurr Priest-Chiefs' Ritual Performances and the Leboku Festival* (Ph.D. dissertation in progress, University of Iowa); Onyile Bassey Onyile, *Ekpu Oron: Spirits of the Living Dead as an Expression of Oron Worldview, 1894-1940* (Ph.D. dissertation in progress, University of Binghamton).

Cross River. By this I mean there are certain overarching practices that are similar in concept throughout the region but which are expressed differently according to specific locality. For example, across the area ancestors and deities have been remembered and honored with carved or molded figures and/or accumulative shrines, and momentous occasions such as commemorative funerals and harvest festivals can be spectacular events combining masquerades, music, and dancing; however, the specific accoutrements and organization of these rituals may vary from place to place. It is to such a shared conceptual realm that I attempt to relate the archaeological terracottas in terms of their appearance and social functions. Although the specific makers (or consumers) of the terracottas have not been identified, the works do suggest and evidence certain ideas and practices that show ancient Calabar to have much in common with the cultural fabric of the Cross River region of more recent history and the present. Art historian Gitti Salami notes:

. . . the various ethnic groups . . . copy from each other whatever they find appealing. In fact, one of the trademarks of Cross River cultural history consists of shared strategies employed in [the] acquisition of other peoples' inventions, and stories about how one ethnic group tricked another out of a particular dance or a masquerade often become part of local legend. This makes for a complicated history throughout the region and for almost indistinguishable aesthetic sensibilities.²⁹

Similarly, the archaeologist Scott MacEachern observes, "Archaeological traditions need not always be equated with ethnic groupings . . . in some cases, artefact production simply operates at different scales than do ethnic groups."³⁰

²⁹ Gitti Salami, "The *Leboku* Festival Pleads for Peace and Plentitude," (Unpublished paper, 2002), 25. Courtesy of Gitti Salami.

³⁰ Scott MacEachern, "'Symbolic Reservoirs' and Inter-group Relations: West African Examples," *The*

Thus, the present study examines the existence of a shared iconography instead of pursuing the wild goose of who might have “invented” it. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, this study favors the generalities of context over the specifics of interpretation in any particular one. This is because, quite simply, the exact meanings of the ancient terracotta designs are unknown and the fact that even today, the full significance of potent symbols in the *nsibidi* corpus is not public information, especially for those people—myself included—who are not members of the societies that use *nsibidi*, such as Ekpe, the elaborate and multi-graded Efik version of the men’s Leopard Society that is widespread throughout the Cross River region.

Prior to colonialism, the Leopard Societies wielded great legislative, judicial, and executive power on the local level, power that was maintained in part through the secrecy surrounding the meanings of *nsibidi*. Their treasuries, supported by high initiation fees, provided the group with the necessary clout to settle disputes and debts and to enforce standards of behavior among the populace. For initiates, the benefits of membership were many, including the prospect of an increase in status and power with each title purchased, as well as support in old age and an honorable burial when the time came. Leopard Society membership cut across ethnic boundaries and served as an important unifying feature in the Cross River region. Today, while the institution’s once paramount political standing has been eclipsed by government, its social position remains strong. Yet, members are still proscribed from discussing with non-members certain institutional knowledge, including the detailed meanings of *nsibidi* signs. Thus, published interpretations of particular signs should be viewed as specific to the time and place of

African Archaeological Review 12 (1994), 220.

their collection, with the implicit understanding that the full meanings almost certainly would not have been offered to the researcher who published them.

On the other hand, some *nsibidi* signs became established within popular culture and are widely understood. For example, an arc generally indicates a person, and by combining them, different sorts of relationships and actions may be described. Hence, the sign of two intertwined arcs signifies love or marriage and is therefore seen at weddings (on the other hand, opposed arcs signify “divorce” or disjunction and have appeared in funerary contexts) (Figs. 1.6-1.7). But even apart from such commonly understood examples as these, local people do recognize *nsibidi* when they see it; the signs are known to be meaningful even if viewers are not able to “translate” them the same way, for example, as would a member of the Leopard Society, or *Ekpa*, the Ejagham women’s association. As we will see, *nsibidi* was used more extensively in the past and so it is likely that a greater widespread knowledge of it existed then as well.

According to the Washington, D.C.-based artist Victor Ekpuk, who is from the Eket area southwest of Calabar, *nsibidi* is foremost an instrument of power, particularly for the Ekpe society. For it to be powerful, it is kept secret so people won’t “abuse” it—to do so, it is thought, could bring “catastrophe” to the community.³¹ Ekpuk himself is not a member of any traditional society that uses *nsibidi*, so his views could be considered to represent a general opinion of it in popular culture. Indeed, some aspects of *nsibidi* are widely known and amount to common knowledge, Ekpuk points out, or rather they are what the societies “wanted us to know,” such as the sign for love just

³¹ Victor Ekpuk, public lecture at the University of Maryland, College Park, 19 November 2002.

mentioned. The artist reminisced that as a youngster, if he and his friends came upon some obviously intentional arrangement of objects, this too was understood to be an *nsibidi* sign. Ekpuk recalls, “It instills fear in you. You want to run from it.”³² *Nsibidi*, then, is considered powerful even when not fully comprehended.

To be clear, I do not wish to imply that the various symbols on the terracottas, or those employed in *nsibidi*, have necessarily retained a significant degree of consistency in their meaning over the last thousand years, as if frozen in time. It seems much more likely that the motifs have been subjected to any number of different interpretations throughout the history of their usage, with particular signs falling into and out of use. Here, I can only draw attention to the historical depth—and using MacEachern’s line of thought, the consequentially broad cultural “scale”—of visual traditions involving the usage of designs comparable to what today may be called *nsibidi*. I will attempt to identify the kinds of events to which the terracottas contributed meaning in the past, based on the comparison of written sources to the archaeological contexts encountered thus far.

Methodology

This dissertation addresses a fundamental historical problem: How is the past related to the present? The anthropologist Christopher Fennell offers a useful theoretical model in his comparative study of “core symbols” employed in the religious practice of the Kongo-speaking peoples of central Africa and how they changed “over time and

³² *Ibid.*

place in the modes of symbolic expressions derived from that belief system,” in the Kongo diaspora of North America that formed as a result of the trans-Atlantic slave trade.³³ Fennel seeks to “[explore] the ways in which [certain] artifacts likely served their creators and users as significant components of private religious rituals, as potential communicators of group identities, and as expressions of individual creativity in the forging of new social relationships.”³⁴

Fennell examined artifacts found in North American sites occupied by African Americans having a significant demographic association with the Kongo region of central Africa and which dated from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries. The finds included objects inscribed with cruciform (“X”) marks—including ceramics, white clay marbles, coins, pewter spoons—as well as small caches of objects “that were secreted along perpendicular axes under the brick and wood floors of dwellings,” thereby forming an imaginary cross.³⁵ Fennell compares such evidence to African Kongo practices involving a similar iconography of core symbols including cruciforms (both literal and implied), white substances (including chalk and shells), and things with reflective surfaces (including glass and metal objects). The author attributes observed differences not so much to changes in belief as in the social situation itself. Namely, enslaved Africans and African-Americans were forced to privatize and simplify religious practices that in the Kongo setting could have been more public and prominent. Though the major

³³ Christopher C. Fennel, “Group Identity, Individual Creativity, and Symbolic Generation in a BaKongo Diaspora,” *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 7, 1 (2003), 2.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

focus of Fennell's study was the effect of external social constraints upon the cultural production of a particular group, his observations regarding core symbols as markers of belief and social practice are nonetheless relevant here. In either case, cultural continuity is physically manifest in core symbols of visual culture that create linkages over time and which allow one to draw comparisons between past and present.

Archaeologist Roderick McIntosh describes core symbols as constituting a "Symbolic Reservoir," which he explained as:

. . . a vast, deep-time, curated supply of symbols or ideologies available as social codes. There are no objective, rigidly-fixed meanings transmitted from the past. Meaning attached to specific elements of the Reservoir often work at the level of social 'givens'; meanings can be quite different for different sub-groups and certainly can change over time We should consider the Symbolic Reservoir to be a fluid pool maintained through time despite the appearance or borrowing of new elements, the waxing and waning of others, or the disappearance of yet others.³⁶

Nsibidi too might be viewed as such a "symbolic" or "conceptual reservoir," though to relate the decoration of ancient Calabar terracottas to modern *nsibidi* would be contingent upon the answers to a number of questions. Namely, what is the nature of the relationship between the peoples now living in the area where archaeological finds were made to the people who actually made them? Can a chronology of occupation be demonstrated? Can the finds be related to the known visual culture of the area? Considering the situation more broadly, it is helpful to ask: How does one go about establishing links between the distant past and the present in a region that, until the

³⁶ Roderick McIntosh, "From Traditional African Art to the Archaeology of Form in the Middle Niger," in ed. Gigi Pezzoli, *From Archaeology to Traditional African Art* (Milan: Centro Studi Archeologia Africana, 1992), 148-149.

arrival of Europeans in the seventeenth century, lacked the benefit of written texts—or at least written texts as we expect them to appear?

Prior to specifically addressing the first three questions, I will speak to the more general fourth question by foregrounding some of the methodological concerns inherent to the comparative study of ancient and modern objects and then explain my method of research that addresses these issues. My methodology combines the art historical practice of visual analysis with methods used in the fields of historical archaeology and ethnoarchaeology, which routinely make use of both archaeological and non-archaeological sources to achieve a better understanding of the past.³⁷ My methodology includes examining each of several different kinds of data—the archaeological record, the ethnographic/written record, oral traditions, and visual culture (including objects and photographs)—to discover points of intersection that would aid the construction of an historical narrative.

There are a number of potential pitfalls to keep in mind. One problem in Nigeria, as with the rest of sub-Saharan Africa, is that the archaeological record is not often as complete as in North America where historical archaeology is more commonly practiced. As well, written texts, especially ones contemporary to the site itself and which constitute such an important aspect of historical archaeology as it is practiced elsewhere, are often nonexistent in the African context. Thus, other kinds of texts are consulted.

³⁷See Christopher DeCorse, “Documents, Oral Histories, and the Material Record: Historical Archaeology in West Africa,” *World Archaeological Bulletin* 7 (1996), 47; Kit Wesler, “Historical Archaeology in West Africa,” in ed. Kit Wesler, *Historical Archaeology in Nigeria* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1998), 3.

Oral History and Archaeology

Archaeological discoveries in Africa are often interpreted in light of indigenous methods for the transmission of historical knowledge, i.e., oral histories.³⁸ For example, the sculptures and other artifacts found at Ile-Ife in southwestern Nigeria, in terms of their dating, subject matter, and the skill displayed in their creation, are evidence that the city was the site of a flourishing ritual and political center, which is consistent with Yoruba oral traditions that identify Ile-Ife as the site of the original Yoruba royal dynasty.³⁹

At Owo, Ekpo Eyo discovered further archaeological evidence to support local oral traditions.⁴⁰ One of the sixteen kingdoms tracing their origins directly to Ile-Ife, Owo contains a sacred grove described in oral histories as the place from which the reportedly fifteenth-century queen Oronsen was forced to flee by the jealous older wives of the king. According to the story, as she left she demanded that great annual sacrifice be made on the anniversary of her departure. In Owo today, there is still an important public festival held to honors that very queen. But just how much historical truth lies in the story of Oronsen's departure? Ekpo Eyo investigated this issue and in the grove called Igbo'Laja, he found terracotta sculptures dating to the fifteenth century that depict

³⁸See Bassey Andah and A. Okpoko, "Oral Traditions and West African Cultural History: A New Direction," *West African Journal of Archaeology* 9 (1979), 201-224; Peter Schmidt, "An Alternative to a Strictly Materialist Perspective: A Review of Historical Archaeology, Ethnoarchaeology, and Symbolic Approaches in African Archaeology," *American Antiquity* 48, 1 (1983), 62-79; DeCorse, 47; Wesler, 3.

³⁹Frank Willett, *Ifè in the History of West African Sculpture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1967); Ekpo Eyo, "1969 Excavations at Ile-Ife," *African Arts* 3,2(1970), 44-47, 87; I. Akinjogbin and R. Olaniyan, "Sources of Ife History," in ed. I. Akinjogbin, *The Cradle of a Race: Ife from the Beginning to 1980* (Port Harcourt: Sunray Publications, 1992).

⁴⁰Ekpo Eyo, "Igbo'Laja, Owo," *West African Journal of Archaeology* 6 (1976), 37-83.

unmistakable images of sacrifice, including a bound fowl; a basket of severed human heads; a basket of fruits; fragments depicting beaded (and therefore probably royal) human arms outstretched and holding small animals; and a leopard gnawing on a human long bone, indicating the king's power to take even human life.

The Igbo'Laja site thus represents a model example of cultural continuity. Despite—and perhaps to a degree because of—certain monumental influences on Nigerian life since the fifteenth century (namely, the transatlantic slave trade, colonialism, and missionary activity), there are aspects of culture that have been willfully preserved over time. Igbo'Laja and the Oronsen Festival is just one example that convincingly illustrates how the past and present can come together in objects, oral traditions, and modern practices. I have previously addressed the issue of how external influences affect the visual culture of traditional institutions in Nigeria⁴¹ and this research (as well as the work of others, notably Roberts and Roberts⁴²) demonstrates how certain visual forms and knowledge can be maintained over time and without written texts in the Western sense.

Meanwhile, one must expect oral traditions to reflect variability because human society is by nature dynamic. Visual culture is, of course, malleable and in Africa perhaps it is made more so over time because the processes by which much visual culture is transmitted are fundamentally verbal (and therefore subject to reinterpretation). For example, in learning how to make a pot in Nigeria, the novice might begin by collecting

⁴¹ Christopher Slogar, "Carved Ogboni Figures from Abeokuta, Nigeria," *African Arts* 35, 4 (2002), 14-27, 91-92.

⁴² Mary Nooter Roberts and Allen F. Roberts, *Memory: Luba Art and the Making of History* (Munich and New York: Prestel and the Museum for African Art, 1996).

and preparing raw materials while observing a senior potter at work and asking questions of her. There is no book to explain where one may find the clay, how to process it, or how to construct a pot so that it will not break when fired. The knowledge of pottery is passed on, implicitly and verbally, as potters carry out their work.⁴³

Ethnicity and Archaeology

Efforts to equate archaeological objects (i.e. material culture) with ethnicity can be problematic because objects do not necessarily tell us how past societies identified themselves. To complicate matters further, the concept of ethnicity as a cultural identifier is itself an inconstant factor and old nomenclature may not agree with the modern situation. One should keep in mind the words of historian Paul Lovejoy, who aptly observed, “Twentieth-century ethnic categories in Africa are often read backwards to the days of slavery, thereby removing ethnic identity from its contemporary political and social context.”⁴⁴ Moreover, ethnicity is processual. Group identities form over time and in response to various interactions with others. Thus, the current ethnographic picture of the Cross River region is certainly different than it was during the time the Calabar terracottas were in use several hundred years ago.

⁴³ On oral tradition and pottery-making, see Henry Glassie, *Material Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999).

⁴⁴ Paul Lovejoy, “The African Diaspora: Revisionist Interpretations of Ethnicity, Culture and Religion under Slavery,” *Studies in the World History of Slavery, Abolition and Emancipation* 2,1 (1997), 12. Electronic journal. Available from <http://www.h-net.org/~slavery/>

MacEachern extends this line of reasoning to include material culture studies, cautioning scholars that artifacts by themselves are not necessarily reliable markers of ethnicity:

. . . there is in fact no rule that states that artifacts must transmit information about ethnicity as we habitually define it. Recognition of this might save us some of the time that we now spend trying to distinguish artefactual variation on a micro-scale—under the impression that we can always identify ethnic groups by doing so.⁴⁵

Efforts to identify the makers of archaeological objects can also be confused by the effects of trade and other means of cultural contact. Hence, a central tenet of archaeology stipulates that the actual origin of an artifact may be far removed in time and place from where it was finally recovered. This point must be emphasized here, because the Cross River region is particularly complex in terms of its population demographics, ethnicities, languages, trading networks, and not least, artistic production. While one certainly cannot *always* identify ethnic groups by artifact analysis, given certain corroborating information, one can draw reasonable conclusions as Fennell demonstrates. Indeed, investigations of style and typology can be very helpful in identifying where, when, and by whom particular artifacts were created. This is the foundation of much art historical and archaeological analysis and it will be of central importance in the present study. Yet because I agree with MacEachern's basic premise, and considering the great ethnic diversity of the Cross River region today and throughout the long period of time since the terracottas were made, I have not attempted here to attribute them to any particular modern group.

⁴⁵ MacEachern, 221.

Keeping these methodological concerns in mind, we can now revisit the questions posed above regarding the Calabar archaeological material. Thus, is it known whether the people(s) presently occupying the areas of Calabar where finds were made are the descendants of those who actually made and/or used them? Is a chronology for the occupation of the area demonstrable? How are the finds relatable to the area's visual culture? These are the questions that have guided my research and it is the purpose of this dissertation to address them. Considering the four categories of data noted above—archaeological record, ethnographic/written record, oral histories, contemporary visual culture—there is a great deal of available information that can be applied to them as will be demonstrated throughout this dissertation.

Most of the terracottas examined come from the sites of Obot Okoho and Okang Mbang, located about eight miles outside of metropolitan Calabar. For a number of reasons, they are well suited to this kind of iconographic approach. First, due to the nature of the sites, a large sample of decorated works (several hundred objects) was available for study. Second, the anthropomorphic figurines from this area provide detailed evidence of body decoration, albeit indirectly, which the figurines found within Calabar do in a much less revealing way. Modes of body decoration similar to that depicted on these figurines (such as body painting, scarification, and elaborate coiffure) may be found in written sources and to some extent are still practiced today. Third, the archaeological contexts of the terracottas have analogues in modern practices. Many written sources since the mid-nineteenth century remark on the ritual usage of ceramics in the Cross River region, describing for example pots placed on shrines as offerings and

within or atop graves to honor and remember the deceased.⁴⁶ Finally, the dates obtained by Ekpo Eyo through radiocarbon analysis, as well as other dating analyses carried out for the art market, constitute a preliminary chronology for the Calabar area. From this, it appears the sites outside Calabar are more recent than the sites located within town limits, which makes relating them to historical sources a more plausible exercise.

The institution of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and later colonialism in Africa often resulted in concerted efforts to obliterate African history. I am interested in recovering part of that history in southeastern Nigeria. The new archaeological evidence strongly suggests that certain aspects of visual culture have endured over long periods of time and in spite of the enormous social, political, and ideological shifts that have taken place there over the last several hundred years. These aspects of continuity are important factors today as they contribute to the maintenance of social identity and communal belonging. This investigation demonstrates that the idea of Calabar as a by-product of the Atlantic trade is altogether inadequate. That trade can now be understood to be a relatively recent development in a much deeper history.

Organization of the Dissertation

Following this introductory chapter, Chapter Two, “Calabar Origins: Histories of Migration in the Lower Cross River Region,” presents the oral traditions of migration as

⁴⁶Early sources that mention the ritual usage of pottery in the Cross River basin include: John Watts, *A True Relation of the Inhumane and Unparallel'd Actions...* (London, 1672):15; Hutchinson, 148; Charles Partridge, *Cross River Natives* (London, 1905), 63, 186; P.A. Talbot, *In the Shadow of the Bush* (London, 1912), 52, 67, 223; Dorothy Talbot, *Women's Mysteries of a Primitive People* (London, 1915), 213, 217; P.A. Talbot, *Life in Southern Nigeria* (London, 1923), 27, 154, 159, 308; and P.A. Talbot, *Peoples of Southern Nigeria*, vol. 2 (London, 1926), 131.

recounted by peoples living there today. This will demonstrate the ethnic and linguistic complexity of the region today, which helps to explain why certain elements of culture were adopted as unifying elements throughout the region.

Chapter Three, “Before Old Calabar: The Archaeology of the Cross River Region to ca.1500 A.D.,” reviews the archaeological record of Calabar and other local sites including Obot Okoho and Okang Mbang, as well as sites farther afield (such as Igbo-Ukwu, Afikpo, and Alok), to offer some understanding of the region during the era preceding the transatlantic trade.

Chapter Four, “Decorated Terracottas from Obot Okoho and Okang Mbang, ca. 1000 – 1450 A.D.” describes a cross-section of terracottas from an area about eight miles outside Calabar municipality, decorated with a striking variety of geometric motifs.

Chapter Five, “From Contact to Colonialism: Sources for Visual Culture of the Cross River Region During the Transatlantic Trade and the Rise of Old Calabar, ca. 1600-1885,” examines the (primarily) European written record of this period for descriptions of visual culture and traditions at Calabar and nearby areas that offer potential insight into the Calabar terracottas.

Chapter Six, “Cross River Visual Culture During Colonialism and the Modern Era, ca. 1885 to the Present,” examines modern sources for information about the present iconography of the Cross River region as manifested in various aspects of visual culture that may be related to the ancient terracottas: pottery, body decoration, woodcarving, metalwork, basketry, masquerades, architectural adornment, shrines, and ceremonials.

Chapter Seven, “Calabar Terracottas: Preliminary Conclusions,” finalizes the dissertation with a general analysis of the material previously covered and offers some

conclusions about the major aspects of the terracottas and their significance within the history of the Cross River region.

An appendix, “*Polyphemus africanus* and the Idea of Calabar: Constructions of Cross River History, ca. 1500-1985,” is included because I feel strongly that when examining African art, it is also necessary to also examine the history of Africa’s reception in the Western world. For much of this history, African culture and art was cast in an overtly negative light, the effects of which linger still. The appendix examines European agendas to control southern Nigeria in general and Calabar in particular as conveyed through various aspects of visual culture, especially maps, prints, and the writings of traders, colonial officials, and missionaries. The attitudes expressed in these sources had much to do with what was stated—or not—about Cross River visual culture.

Previous Research

My work in Nigeria began in the summer of 1996. A Research Fellowship in Archaeology from the Department of Art History and Archaeology and a Travel Grant from the Committee for Africa and the Americas enabled me to assist in Ekpo Eyo’s excavation in Calabar of a probable human burial at Abasi Edem Street that contained dozens of terracottas among other objects and which dated to the eighth-tenth century A.D. This site, among others, is mentioned in Chapter Three.

During the summer of 1997, a Research Fellowship in Archaeology from the Department of Art History and Archaeology allowed me to again assist Ekpo Eyo in archaeological investigations in the Calabar area, this time a few miles outside Calabar municipality at Obot Okoho and Okang Mbang. By the time we arrived, some of the

sites had already been looted to supply the antiquities trade, and others were disturbed by erosion caused by natural forces as well as building and road construction. What remained, however, was clear evidence that an important ceramic tradition once thrived in the region. The hundreds of mostly fragmentary artifacts recovered there are now conserved in the Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

In the summer of 1999, I returned to Calabar to study at greater length the decoration of the objects recovered in previous years, which are stored at the Old Residency Museum, Calabar. I documented over three hundred objects, mostly from the 1997 sites located outside the town. My analysis of this material forms the core of the dissertation and is the subject of Chapter Four.

During 2001, I conducted twelve months of research on the art and history of the Cross River region as a Smithsonian Institution Predoctoral Fellow at the National Museum of African Art in Washington, DC. Also during that year, I traveled to Great Britain to carry out research at various institutions holding significant collections of material related to the Cross River region, including The British Museum (London), the British Foreign and Commonwealth Record Office (London), and the Pitt-Rivers Museum (Oxford), with funding provided by the Samuel H. Kress Foundation Travel Fellowship in the History of Art. A Research Grant-in-Aid from the Cosmos Club Foundation, Washington, DC, allowed me to continue the project in Scotland, with visits to the National Library of Scotland (Edinburgh), the Royal Scottish Museum (Edinburgh), and the Hunterian Museum, University of Glasgow. I returned to Great Britain in 2003 to continue this project.

In order to get a better idea of pottery-making in the lower Cross River region, I returned to Nigeria in 2002 to visit places where pottery production is known to have taken place in recent history (e.g. the villages of Nkpara and Esuk Otu) and where it is still occurring today (e.g. the towns of Afikpo and Ishiagu). During this trip, I also documented objects recently collected by the Old Residency Museum and assisted in Ekpo Eyo's excavation at Ikang, a coastal trading village located about twenty miles southeast of Calabar near the Cameroon border (however, this excavation is not discussed here). While in Lagos, I visited the National Museum and examined the collections of Calabar terracottas and other Nigerian ceramics conserved there.

In 2004, I returned once more to Calabar, where I carried out additional research at the Old Residency Museum and other localities in the area.

CHAPTER TWO

CALABAR ORIGINS:
HISTORIES OF MIGRATION IN THE LOWER CROSS RIVER REGION

The Cross River region constitutes a meeting point between western and central Africa and is home peoples representing several distinct subdivisions of the Benue-Kwa branch of the vast Niger-Congo language family. These include Igbo, Central Niger (e.g. Nupe and Idoma), Jukun, Cross River (e.g. Efik, Ibibio, Mbembe, Boki), and Bantoid (e.g. Mamfe, Ejagham, Qua, and possibly Efut). To get some idea of the linguistic complexity involved, consider that just the Upper Cross subdivision—one of six within the Cross River group just noted—contains no less than nineteen distinct languages having among them twenty-nine identified dialects.⁴⁷ Such linguistic diversity no doubt contributed to the acephalous nature of Cross River governance. Therefore, it may not be surprising that there is no known history in this region of the kind of large centralized and highly stratified polities found elsewhere in Nigeria, such as the Yoruba kingdoms, where a language shared over a broad geographic area facilitated political organization. In the Cross River region, rather than language, certain institutions (e.g. the Leopard Society), as well as some aspects of visual culture, afforded a degree of commonality among the great diversity of peoples.

This chapter presents evidence taken from oral histories collected amongst various Cross River peoples. Most of the information was collected during the twentieth

⁴⁷ Jan Sterk, “The Upper Cross Languages in their Linguistic Context,” in ed. Monday Abasiattai, *A History of the Cross River Region of Nigeria* (Enugu: Harris Publishers, 1990), 60.

century, in many cases by local people. Because this information concerns activities that took place so long ago, and because oral traditions are by nature susceptible to reinterpretation over time, they should not be considered literal truth. For example, depending on whose version of events is being considered, they can be especially murky, or even conflicting, about chronologies. And there can be no doubt that modern politics and history have significantly influenced how people view and present their past.

Calabar today is home to three main ethnic groups, the Efik, the Efut, and the Qua respectively. Their oral histories, perhaps not surprisingly, are rather contentious on the issue of who among them arrived first—each of the three claims primacy. But there is no indisputable evidence to demonstrate who arrived first or when the arrivals may have taken place. Yet the question itself has not been limited to the realm of academia; in practice, it has been of central importance to such events as land ownership disputes argued in the courts and the consequences of inviting the “wrong” representative to pour libations at formal events can have lasting repercussions. Thus, the potential impact of the Calabar terracottas upon this debate is not insignificant, but the extent to which the archaeological evidence may be related to it has not been established.

Linguistic Evidence and Traditions of Origin

By all accounts, the Efik language is more closely related to the languages spoken on the opposite (western) side of the Cross River from Calabar—e.g. Ibibio, Oron, Eket, and Ibeno—than to the languages of their immediate neighbors the Qua and Efut, whose

languages more closely relate to others found east of the Cross River.⁴⁸ An Efik relation to the western side of the river is also prominent in their migration histories.

Making the linguistic aspect of Calabar history even more complex is the fact that the Efut of Calabar, due to their longstanding close relationship to the Efik, now generally speak Efik to the virtual exclusion of their former language (the Qua, it should be noted, speak their own language as well as Efik). The linguist Jan Sterk, following somewhat Greenberg's original classification, makes a clear distinction between the Bantu languages and Efik. Sterk groups Efik among the "Cross River" languages, while Qua and Ejagham fall under the "Bantoid" subdivision as "Ekoid Bantu."⁴⁹ Efut, while also in this "Bantoid" group, is listed provisionally within a different sub-category, "Narrow Bantu." (In light of Ekpo Eyo's work linking Calabar to the central African Bantu area, it is interesting that Sterk's "Narrow Bantu" also includes Lingala, a language spoken in the Congo region.⁵⁰)

While there are several disparate traditions of Efik origin, it is telling that they generally include previous affiliations with other groups on the opposite side of the Cross River (e.g. the Igbo and Ibibio). Thus, the ancestors of the present-day Efik most probably came to Creek Town (their original Calabar settlement) from the northwest,

⁴⁸ See Latham, *Old Calabar 1600-1891*, 9; Bassey Andah, "The Efiks and Peoples of the Cross River Basin," in ed. Bassey Andah, *Some Nigerian Peoples*, special book issue and supplement to *West African Journal of Archaeology* 18 (Ibadan, 1988), 45-49.

⁴⁹ Sterk, 57.

⁵⁰ For example, Ekpo Eyo, "Excavations in Calabar, Cross River State of Nigeria and the Question of Bantu Migration," paper read at the 1998 meeting of the African Studies Association, New Orleans, Louisiana; Sterk, 57.

after periodic settlement and migration among neighbors who time and again forced their exodus (these are considered to be Igbo- and Ibibio-speakers). Efik oral histories maintain that in the late sixteenth century (or earlier according to some versions), they left this area and traversed the Cross River to settle permanently at Ikot Etunko, the present Creek Town. In the early seventeenth century, a dispute caused a splinter group to leave, resulting in the founding of Obutong, or Old Town. Meanwhile, two grandsons of one of the five founding families of Creek Town, after growing up in exile because they were twins, are believed to have established Atakpa, now known as Duke Town. This general chronology is supported by Latham's genealogical study of the king lists of Old Town.⁵¹

A. K. Hart, prior to his analysis of the oral histories presented by several prominent Efik and Efut leaders who testified at the "Enquiry into the Dispute over the Obongship of Calabar," expressed reservations about the veracity of the information he heard there:

. . . in an enquiry like this where almost everyone has a partisan interest, it is not unusual for quasi-historical material to be deliberately distorted for obvious reasons One has to be careful, therefore, in sifting such evidence, particularly when it is advanced by persons who claim with almost ridiculous assurance that they are authorities in Efik history . . .⁵²

Despite such criticism, in the end, the similarities found among the various competing versions offered to him—e.g. the repeated cycle of settlement and forced migration; the time at Uruan that closely preceded the arrival at Creek Town; the admission to finding

⁵¹ Latham, 11-12.

⁵² A. K. Hart, *Report of the Enquiry into the dispute over the Obongship of Calabar* (Enugu, 1964),

others in the area upon their arrival—suggested to Hart that the overall narrative presented to him was basically sound.

The Qua claim that their ancestors migrated to the Cross River region by land from Mbakang in what is today Southwest Province of Cameroon, along with the Ejagham peoples who still occupy much of the inland areas north of Calabar. At some point a splinter group moved southward, finally settling in the lower Cross River region in places amenable to their agricultural and hunting lifestyle.⁵³ In the immediate Calabar area, several communities developed, with Akim Qua Town and Big Qua Town the most prominent among them. Development has since incorporated them within the growing Calabar metropolis.

The Efut claim their ancestors migrated by water from the area of today's Batanga division of Southwest Province in Cameroon. They traveled up the Cross River estuary and settled the lands adjacent to its tributary, the Calabar River, that were, or would later be, in close proximity to the major Efik settlements.⁵⁴ Their towns have also been incorporated into urban Calabar. As a result of their proximity and working relationship to the Efik, the Efut of Calabar have been acculturated to Efik ways, and now speak Efik in place of their Bantoid language.

⁵³ See the discussion by Sandy Onor, *The Ejagham Nation in the Cross River Region of Nigeria* (Ibadan: Kraft Books, 1994), 62-68; see also Eyo Akak, *The Quas: Origin and History* (Calabar: Akak and Sons, 1995) and Eweng Akin, *The Quas of Calabar* (Calabar: Eweng Akin, 1988).

⁵⁴ I am grateful to A. J. H. Latham for providing me a copy of Chief E. Edem's 1947 paper, "A Brief History of the Efut People" (unpublished typescript manuscript). There are few major published sources for Efut history. For references to their migrations from Cameroon, see E. Aye, *Old Calabar Through the Centuries* (Calabar: Hope Waddell Press, 1967):41; Latham, 5; Kannan Nair, *Politics and Society in South Eastern Nigeria 1841-1906* (London: Frank Cass, 1972), 3; Thompson, 227-268; Eyo Akak, *Efuts: Disintegration and Integration: A Chronicle of Their Sociological Transformation from Efut to Efik* (Calabar: Ekikak Works, 1998), 15-28.

Other Early Accounts of Calabar Migrations

There are several other ethnic groups in southeastern Nigeria who believe their early histories involved the Calabar area in the distant past. When considered together, these oral histories provide evidence that the area has long been a cultural crossroads, even before the arrival of the current populations. For example, Aya Iyo, a prominent figure in the traditions of the Idua of Oron, is said to have created a settlement on the Great Qua River in Calabar in the late seventeenth century, while another Idua fisherman named Atu Iyoka is believed to have founded a settlement on the Calabar River.⁵⁵

Another Oron group, the Ebughu, claim that their founding ancestor Otong, upon his departure from southwestern Cameroon, first settled at Obutong (Old Town), Calabar, before moving to the present Oron location on the opposite side of the Cross River.⁵⁶

According to N. C. Ejituwu, the Obolo (also called the Andoni) and the Ibino peoples claim their ancestors moved through the area during their westward migration from the Cameroon/Nigeria coastal area to their present settlements in the Kwa Iboe and Imo River estuaries of the eastern Niger Delta.⁵⁷ Based on oral histories as well as linguistic studies, the historian E. J. Alagoa maintains such migrations would have occurred before the sixteenth century.⁵⁸

Several Biase groups (including the Abini, Akpet, Umon, Ugbagara, and some Adim peoples) also trace their early histories to the Calabar area before moving

⁵⁵ Okon Uya, *A History of Oron People of the Lower Cross River Basin* (Oron: Manson, 1984), 15-16.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁵⁷ See N. C. Ejituwu, "The Lower Cross Region: Andoni Migrations and Settlement," in ed. Abasiattai, *A History of the Cross River Region of Nigeria*, 30-31.

⁵⁸ E.J. Alagoa, "Relations between the Cross River Region and the Niger Delta," in ed. Abasiattai, 148-150.

northwards by land to their present locales in the middle Cross River region.⁵⁹ Daniel Odop, an Abini, told the historian Stella Attøe: “We all came from Akpa, situated near a creek between Efut Abua and the Akpayefe River, east of Calabar . . . [before we] migrated to the present site” (north of Umon on the eastern side of the Cross River).⁶⁰

Traditions collected from the same general area among the Adim also claim Calabar origins. In 1983, an Akpet informant, Mr. G. Uka, reported to Attøe:

Our people came from the Cameroon area, from where they migrated to Calabar area. In those days, our ancestors used to live in the Efut area of Calabar. The Efik and Abakpa [Qua] people also used to live here. Our people left Efut as a result of a war between the Efut and Abakpa people in Calabar. The war was so serious that our people decided to leave the area. Our people then left Efut and migrated through Akamkpa and Odukpani areas. In the process of migration, our people settled in different places which I cannot recall. But after many years of migration, they arrived in their present area. . .⁶¹

An Ubagara informant, Madam Ajah Ukwene, offered this version in which a pot figures prominently:

From the Cameroon area, our people came to settle with the Qua people of Calabar . . . Our people left the area following a misunderstanding and serious fight between our people and either the Efik or the Qua . . . In the process of migration our people carried a large pot called *etcha*, which contained some protective charms.⁶²

⁵⁹ Stella Attøe, *A Federation of the Biase People: Origin and Development of Biase Ethnicity 1750-1950* (Enugu: Harris Publishers Unlimited, 1990), 2. See also Otu Ubi, “Biase Communities of South Eastern Nigeria: Melting Pot of Cultures,” *Nigeria Magazine* 55, 4 (1987), 67, citing Enyi Eyak, “The Traditions of Origin and Growth of Egup Ipa Confederacy” (Unpublished B.A. thesis, University of Calabar, 1980), 12-14.

⁶⁰ Attøe, 6, 8.

⁶¹ Attøe, 8, 17. See also Ubi 1987, 67, citing Eyak 1980, 12-14.

⁶² Attøe, 3-4. Attøe describes this informant as being over ninety years of age, “. . . the oldest person in Ikun and she is well-versed in the traditions of Biase” (n. 4, 29).

As described by Onun Ikunegwang Ethothi Bassey, another Ugbagara tradition describes a period during which they encountered the Efik at Calabar:

Our people came from Ebe-Oton in Calabar. The Qua, Efut and Okoyong people were our neighbours . . . Our people used to fight wars with their neighbors in our ancestral homeland. But these wars were usually not large-scale warfare. But when the Efik people arrived in this place, fighting and wars increased . . . As a result of these feuds, our people and the Okoyong people left the area.⁶³

The linguist Sterk would generally agree with this scenario. He drew the hypothesis that much of the land along the Cross River was first occupied by Ekoid Bantu-speaking peoples (whose descendants would include the Ejagham and Qua), while the estuary and immediate riverside regions were peopled by speakers of Upper Cross River languages (whose descendants would include the Okoyong and Biase) who likely followed the Cross River from the interior of Cameroon. At some point later, Efik-speakers—and, I presume from Sterk’s analysis, speakers of other Lower Cross languages such as Ibeno and Obolo—moved into the Cross River estuary from the Cameroon coast.⁶⁴

What is most important to remember in the context of the present study is not whom among the present peoples of Calabar might have arrived first—this question may never be answered to the satisfaction of all. Rather, what is more significant is that so many different populations claim a connection to Calabar (that all of them trace their ancestry to southwestern Cameroon generally may account for some aspects of culture that are shared widely among them). Thus, the heterogeneous quality of Cross River cultures is a major—if not *the* major—factor to keep in mind when considering the

⁶³ Attoe, 5.

⁶⁴ Sterk, 67.

authorship of the terracottas found in the Calabar area. That there are different ceramic pastes and styles evident in these terracottas indicates multiple centers of production, which may well have resulted from so many different peoples moving through the area throughout its history. This is further indicated by the broad chronology for the terracottas known to date, which encompasses a period of one thousand years. Though the question of authorship cannot be answered now, the significance of the terracottas—and in particular their visual language—does have much in common with aspects of Cross River visual culture that continue to be shared widely throughout the region.

A Note on the Etymology of Calabar: “Old” and “New”

The city known today as Calabar was formerly a number of independent towns and villages—primarily the Efik trading polities of Creek Town, Old Town, Henshaw Town, Cobham Town, and Duke Town—collectively deemed Old Calabar by Europeans in the seventeenth century, until 1904 when the appellation “Old” was officially dropped. Calabar municipality and its suburbs have since grown considerably and today encompass areas occupied by the Qua and Efut, which were previously considered the “hinterland” of Old Calabar. The political administration of modern Calabar is divided between two Local Government Areas: Calabar Municipality and Calabar South.

The word “Calabar” requires some explication, as the history of its usage in written sources has caused some confusion among writers. Various referring to the Calabar River (a tributary of the Cross River), as well as the local towns and people, the Calabar of “Old Calabar” commonly encountered in the literature should not be confused with the other trading state and river formerly known as Calabar or Kalabar, and later

New Calabar, in the Niger Delta to the west, nor with the peoples who lived there—the Kalabari Ijo—after whom that version of the term was derived.⁶⁵

According to recent scholarship, the earliest appearance of “Calabar” on paper is a Venetian account of 1517 based on Portuguese information.⁶⁶ This example in fact refers to a village on the river the Portuguese named the Rio Réal, which is the homeland of the Kalabari Ijo—thus the village, understandably, was named after the people who resided there. While the Kalabari are not closely related to the inhabitants of modern Calabar in the Cross River region, a 1618 Portuguese map may have contributed to the semantic confusion, because it curiously labels a large region covering much of southern Nigeria “Calabar”—including both the Rio Réal and the Cross River regions—in a manner indicative of a large political district, such as a kingdom (i.e. not merely a single town).⁶⁷ While there is no reason to believe any such state ever existed, it does set an early precedent for the application of the term “Calabar” to an area beyond the Niger Delta.

The Cross River appellation appeared later than the Niger Delta version.

According to some, the Cross River version may be a corruption of the Portuguese

⁶⁵New Calabar is now called Degema. See Simmons, “An Ethnographic Sketch of the Efik People,” in Daryll Forde (ed.), *Efik Traders of Old Calabar* (London: 1956), 4.

⁶⁶P. E. H. Hair, “Discovery and Discoveries: The Portuguese in Guinea 1444-1650,” *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 69 (1992), 13, n. 12, referring to Francisco Leite de Faria and Avelino Teixeira da Mota, “Novidades náuticas e ultramarinas numa informação dada em Veneza em 1517,” *Memórias da Academia das Ciências de Lisboa*, Classe de Ciências, XX (1977), 7-75, reprinted as Série separatas, no. 99 (Lisbon: Centro de Estudos de Cartografia Antiga, 1977), 23, 62-63.

⁶⁷ See Michel Mollat du Jourdin, et al., *Sea Charts of the Early Explorers* (NY: Thames and Hudson, 1984), 73.

calabarra, “the bar is silent,” in reference to the calm waters of the estuary.⁶⁸ In any case, the residents of Calabar consider the term to be European in origin, as local languages have their own words for the formerly distinct (and often competing) towns that comprised Old Calabar, e.g. *Obutong* (Old Town), *Atakpa* (Duke Town), etc.

It was not until the second half of the seventeenth century that a semantic distinction was made between the Niger Delta and Cross River versions. The Dutch chronicler Olfert Dapper, basing his information on the reports of others, published a description of Africa in 1668, *Naukeurige Beschrijvinge der Afrikaensche*, in which he used the terms *Oudt Kalbarien* and *Oude Kalborgh* to distinguish the Cross River tributary from the other river in the Niger Delta, which he called simply *Kalbarien*.⁶⁹ The 1705 English translation of William Bosman (1704) further differentiates the two by using “Old Calbary” and “New Calbary.”⁷⁰ If it seems that the “Old” was added to Calabar (Cross River) before anyone was calling its Kalabari homonym “New,” it may be because the Dutch—who came after the Portuguese to Africa—happened to know the Calabar of the Cross River before they knew the Kalabari region of Rio Réal, so they deemed the former “Old” Calabar.⁷¹

⁶⁸ See Nair, 2.

⁶⁹ This follows Leers’ 1665 edition of Leo Africanus in which appears *Oude Calborch*, along with the older Portuguese name *Rio Reaal* (Rio Réal) to indicate the Kalabari region. See Ardener, 23, 34, n. 41.

⁷⁰ E.g. “Old and New Calbary,” in William Bosman, *Nauwkeurige beschryving van de Guinese Goud-, Tand-, en Slavekust* (Utrecht, 1704; annotated edition of the 1705 English translation by J. R. Willis, J. D. Fage, and R. E. Bradbury, *A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea* (London: Cass 1967), 399.

⁷¹ Ardener, 34, n. 41.

To sum, “Old Calabar” is a European term that was current from the latter 1600s until 1904, which refers to the area containing the cluster of Efik polities located on the Calabar River near its junction with the Cross River. Here, I will use “Calabar” more broadly in the modern sense, to include the inland areas of the Qua and Efut peoples, some of which lies within Calabar Municipality Local Government Area. Thus, I decided that “Calabar terracottas” best describes the archaeological material found throughout the area. I will make every effort to clarify my usage as needed throughout this dissertation.

CHAPTER THREE

BEFORE OLD CALABAR: THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE CROSS RIVER REGION TO CA.1500 A.D.

While Calabar benefits from a number of rescue excavations, the rest of Cross River State, except for a few isolated localities, remains to be investigated by archaeologists. Yet, what has been discovered so far reveals a great deal about artistic practice, among other things, and suggests that much of the visual culture of the modern era has roots extending into the distant past.

Monoliths of the Alok Area, Upper Cross River Region

What may be the oldest surviving art in the Cross River region also offers what may be the earliest evidence of *nsibidi*. The carved stones near Alok in the upper Cross River region display carefully rendered concentric circles, spirals, lozenges, and other discrete figures now associated with *nsibidi* and the ways it has been used to decorate the human body (Fig. 1.4). Within a circle of these stones at Emangabe village, Ekpo Eyo obtained a sample of charcoal, which by means of radiocarbon testing yielded a date of 1750 +/- 50 B.P., that is 120-220 A.D.—but Eyo himself expressed serious reservations over this date because it is only a singular result.⁷² On the other hand, Eyo later noted that a radiocarbon date associated with similar carved stones at nearby Alok supported Philip Allison's sixteenth-century dating based on local oral traditions.⁷³

⁷² Ekpo Eyo, "Alok and Emangabe stone monoliths: Ikom, Cross River State of Nigeria," 103.

⁷³ Ekpo Eyo, "Carved monolith (*atal*)," 374.

The Bakor Ejagham who live in the area today do not know whether their ancestors actually made the stones, although they do identify the stones with them.⁷⁴ It could also be that the makers, for whatever reason, abandoned the stones, which were then found sometime later by the ancestors of the current population. In any case, Partridge in 1905 first reported that the stones were included in the New Yam Festival, which is still practiced today.⁷⁵ Whatever their history may be—and certainly additional excavation is called for—the stones provide important evidence of complex social organization and status, sophisticated art production, body decoration, and a visual language that are comparable to *nsibidi* as well as the Calabar terracottas.

Calabar: Undated Sites

The first researcher to recognize the archaeological significance of terracottas found at Calabar was Violetta Ekpo, formerly curator of the Old Residency Museum in Calabar (now Director of Museums for the Nigerian National Commission for Museums and Monuments), who conducted a number of rescue excavations associated with various building projects in the 1970s, such as the construction of the University of Calabar (UNICAL) campus. In a 1977 publication, Ekpo identified two types of sites.⁷⁶ The first comprised a number of distinct round pits, dark in color and containing a variety of highly decorated ceramic vessels and figurines, iron implements and slag, and

⁷⁴ Philip Allison, *Cross River Monoliths* (Lagos: Department of Antiquities, 1968), 33-36.

⁷⁵ Partridge, *Cross River Natives*, 272-273; see also Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria*, v. II, 348.

⁷⁶ Violetta Ekpo, "New Archaeological Materials from Calabar, Nigeria," *The Nigerian Field* 42, 4 (1977), 36-38.

occasionally nineteenth-century gin bottles (Figs. 3.1-3.2). Ekpo noted that despite the creativity evident in the forms and designs of the pottery, its quality was generally poor, to the extent that the objects were probably too weak for daily domestic use. Considering this along with their rich decoration, she concluded that the finds must have had some ceremonial function, in this case probably funereal considering the high number of pits located in an area that according to local oral tradition was a cemetery.⁷⁷ Ekpo elsewhere cites various historical accounts describing local burial practices in which articles of personal property were interred with the deceased in order to display that person's status and maintain it in the afterlife.⁷⁸ The investigated pits, however, contained no identifiable human remains, but the soil in this tropical region is not generally conducive to the preservation of organic material. The second type of site, according to Ekpo, "was characterized by wide layouts of potsherds and fragments of stone artifacts, the positioning, features, and peculiar way of breakage of which suggested habitation area[s]."⁷⁹ In further evidence of this conclusion, she commented that the ceramics associated with such "layout" sites were of noticeably stronger fabric and displayed more standardized forms and decorations than the material recovered from the "grave pits." In other words, this material was more in keeping with what could be considered mass-produced household pottery meant to be used regularly, as in food preparation.

⁷⁷ Ekpo, "New Archaeological Materials from Calabar, Nigeria," 36.

⁷⁸ Violetta Ekpo, "Archaeological Discoveries in Calabar, 1976-1977" (unpublished paper presented to the Cultural Centre Board, Calabar, Nigeria, May 1978), 11. Courtesy of Violetta Ekpo.

⁷⁹ Ekpo, "New Archaeological Materials from Calabar, Nigeria," 36.

Later studies by Ekpo described additional pit and layout sites within Calabar municipality, of all which were located within areas traditionally owned by the Qua peoples of Akim Qua Town and Big Qua Town. This was the primary factor, understandably, in her attribution of these sites as Qua and for her comparison of the decorative motifs to Qua/Ejagham body art and other forms of decoration (including *nsibidi*) that have ritual meaning.⁸⁰ The most common finds were terracottas in many different forms, including a large number of vessels ranging from plain wares to richly decorated pieces (often placed on their side or upside-down), as well as a much smaller number of anthropomorphic figurines and objects later interpreted by Ekpo Eyo to be headrests. These pit sites, it should be noted, contained a varying number of ceramics, from as few as three to as many as one hundred and fifty. Ekpo took this as an indication that some level of social stratification characterized the society responsible for the deposition of the material. Still no identifiable human remains were found, but the writer did mention that certain discolored soil patches were likely were the remains of decayed bone. The pits also contained various numbers of other artifacts, including iron implements and slag; pieces of unfired clay and hematite (iron ore); rounded quartz pebbles and quartz rubbing stones (the latter are tools used in pottery production,

⁸⁰ Violetta Ekpo, "Archaeological Discoveries in Calabar, 1976-1977," esp. p. 12 on comparisons to Ejagham body art; Violetta Ekpo, "Ritual Ceramics in Qua Burial Assemblages," in J. Alexander (ed.), *Material Culture Studies in Archaeology in Africa: A Symposium* (Cambridge Monographs in African Archaeology, Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, Ltd, 1983) (the writer has been unable to locate this article); "Qua Terracotta Sculptures," *African Arts* 18, 1 (1984), 58-60, 96; Violetta Ekpo, "Archaeology and Historical Insights from Rescue Excavations in Calabar Nigeria," in Monday Abasiattai (ed.), *Expanding Frontiers of African History: The Inter-disciplinary Methodology* (Calabar: University of Calabar Press, 1988), 317-331 (esp. 328 on Ejagham decorative/ritual motifs); Violetta Ekpo and Keith Nicklin, "New Archaeological Sites in the Lower Cross River Region," *The Nigerian Field* 47, 1-3 (1982), 45-50.

identified by their flat polished surfaces); bits of charcoal; beads; and occasionally European imports such as porcelain plates and gin bottles.

Ekpo's original interpretation of such pits as "graves" broadened as more sites were uncovered:

The lack of definite evidence of human remains at the pits and the nature of the finds indicate that these were places for the safekeeping of ritual objects. The objects may have been used in traditional ceremonies involving cooking, eating, sacrifice, and libation, being buried after each use.⁸¹

The dark oval pits on three excavated sites represent well constructed burial or sacrificial places where special inventory was placed. The body of the deceased and his relatives or slaves (as the numerous decayed-bone colouration spots indicate) were laid on the bottom of the pit.⁸²

The several figurines Ekpo described in reports from 1977-1984 can be placed into two distinct formal categories, here called Type I and Type II. Type I includes two examples found in Akim Qua Town, Calabar, to which may be added a third excavated by Ekpo Eyo in the Efut ward of Calabar in 1996 (Fig. 3.3).⁸³ They display a flat head with simple facial features, an arms-akimbo gesture, and a long columnar torso. Their wrists display coiled bracelets in the form of copper-alloy manillas, while one male figure holds what looks to be a leaf in each hand. They are otherwise undecorated.

The second type of figurine was also found by Ekpo in the area of Akim Qua Town in Calabar (more recently, a few examples were found by museum staff along Ndidem Usang Iso Street). These Type II figurines display a rounded head with detailed hairstyle atop a body in the form of a globular pot terminating in a short and slightly

⁸¹ Ekpo, "Qua Terracotta Sculptures," 58.

⁸² Ekpo, "Archaeology and Historical Insights from Rescue Excavations in Calabar Nigeria," 326.

⁸³ Ekpo, "Qua Terracotta Sculptures," 58, 60.

flared pedestal base (Fig. 3.1). They vary in height from about 16 to 30 centimeters. In place of the distinctive head seen on the Abasi Edem figurine, a squat face appears on the neck of the vessel and is topped with an elaborate coiffure. On some examples, the face is rendered in a simplified fashion with exaggerated arched eyebrows. The eyes, mouth, and ears are typically indicated with small pierced slits, while the ears are accentuated with curved flanges in low relief. A simple knob on the abdomen represents the navel.

Type II figurines typically display geometric decoration extending the frontal length of the torso, demarcated on either side with parallel grooved vertical lines with prominent ridges in between. The designs consist of series of small raised knobs arranged in rows or crescentically, and incised parallel lines often in “v”-shapes or arcs.

At the time Violetta Ekpo was curator of the Old Residency Museum in Calabar, Keith Nicklin documented a number of archaeological sites during his extensive field-work as an ethnographer for the Nigerian Department of Antiquities. His article published in 1980 describes sixteen sites located throughout the Cross River region, two of which were in Calabar and contained material similar to that recovered by Ekpo.⁸⁴

Three other sites Nicklin mentioned might indicate a wider distribution for Calabar-type wares, particularly the type of small bowls found by the hundreds around Oboto Okoho, examined in the Chapter Four. For example, in the Ibibio village of Eshiet Ekim (Uyo), Nicklin collected an incomplete red pedestal bowl with a projecting lug and skeuomorphic weaving decoration that he later noted was similar to terracottas he recovered from a site along the Old Marian Road extension in Calabar, which he

⁸⁴ Keith Nicklin, “Archaeological Sites in the Cross River Region,” *Nyame Akuma* 16 (1980), 17-23.

considered to be the remains of a shrine.⁸⁵ Uyo Ravine, another Ibibio site, yielded a “pedestal [from a bowl] with decoration in the form of a cross on the base.”⁸⁶ The third site Nicklin named, Mbakang village in Southwest Province, Cameroon, holds additional significance because the Ejagham peoples—including the Qua of Calabar—consider it their ancestral homeland.⁸⁷ There, Nicklin excavated fragments of a red terracotta bowl, which “decorated with an incised [interlace pattern], resembled some of the recently excavated ware from the Qua area of Calabar.”⁸⁸ If this material is indeed closely related to that found at Calabar, it could be the first archaeological evidence to support the oral histories concerning Qua migrations from Mbakang to Calabar and may help to date those events. Further archaeological work is needed to clarify this issue.

The Problem of Chronology

Evidently, the soil and charcoal samples that Ekpo collected for scientific analysis⁸⁹ were never sent to a laboratory, no doubt due to the strained finances of her institution. Thus, the material she and Nicklin published lack dates and so, unfortunately, there is no historical framework to build upon other than a late nineteenth to early twentieth century deposition for some objects found in association with European

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*; Nicklin, “Destruction of a pottery shrine in Calabar,” (unpublished typescript report, August, 1972), n.p. Courtesy of Jill Salmons.

⁸⁶ Nicklin, “Archaeological Sites in the Cross River Region,” 17, 19.

⁸⁷ See Onor, 39-40.

⁸⁸ Nicklin, “Archaeological Sites in the Cross River Region,” 20; correction, *Nyame Akuma* 17 (1980), 41.

⁸⁹ Ekpo, “Archaeology and Historical Insights from Rescue Excavations in Calabar Nigeria,” 328.

imports. Yet Ekpo did indicate that the pottery found with such imports is “qualitatively and quantitatively different” from the pottery typical of other Calabar sites, which she considered to be earlier.⁹⁰ Moreover, she found evidence of secondary usage,⁹¹ so the reuse of found material may not have been uncommon. This would not be surprising in light of the rather widespread practice in Nigeria of incorporating found archaeological material into later contexts. For example, in 1971, Ekpo Eyo documented at Owo, Nigeria, the case of ca. fifteenth-century terracottas in a seventeenth-century context.⁹² And the ancient polished stone celts discovered by Yoruba farmers have so often been used in modern Sango worship that their image constitutes the primary iconographical attribute of the god.

In an early paper, Ekpo opined that the Calabar terracottas were perhaps a few hundred years old.⁹³ She later expanded this point considerably, questioning whether the old terracottas could be related to more well known examples from Nigerian art history, such as the renowned works from Benin or Igbo Ukwu. Indeed, Ekpo was prescient to mention the latter. We have since learned that the dates for some sites excavated by Ekpo Eyo in Calabar are contemporaneous with Igbo Ukwu, which is located only about one hundred miles away. There are also some similarities in the finds themselves, discussed below.

⁹⁰ Ekpo, “Archaeological Discoveries in Calabar, 1976-1977,” 15-16; see also Ekpo and Nicklin 1982, 45.

⁹¹ Ekpo, “Archaeological Discoveries in Calabar, 1976-1977,” 14.

⁹² Eyo, “Igbo’Laja, Owo,” pl. 12, 56-57.

⁹³ Ekpo, “Archaeological Discoveries in Calabar, 1976-1977,” 17.

Recent Excavations at Calabar

Old Marian Road (ca. 450-850 A.D.)

In 1999, Ekpo Eyo excavated a site adjacent to Old Marian Road in Calabar, which contained a large number of decorated ceramics arranged in two concentrations that were curved, or crescentic, in shape (Fig. 3.4). Many of the ceramics were placed sideways or inverted, thereby foregrounding the designs, which include concentric circles and spirals, interlaces, interlocking lozenges and cruciforms, and skeuomorphic basket-weaving designs (Figs. 3.5-3.7).

Two samples of charcoal found in association with pottery at the Old Marian Road site were radiocarbon dated and calibrated by Beta Analytic, Inc. (Miami, FL). The calibration used the 2-Sigma method, which yields a 95% probability that the actual date of the sample lies within the indicated range.

1) Beta 128892	1400 +/- 90 BP	cal 445-785 AD
2) Beta 128891	1380 +/- 90 BP	cal 530-855 AD

Among the finds recovered at this site are some terracotta objects identified as headrests. They are round, pyramidal, or quadrangular in profile and often taper outward from top to bottom. The top is slightly concave and curves upward, a feature that prompted Eyo to identify them as headrests because they resemble the shape of headrests still found throughout the Africa, most of which are wood. Ceramic headrests, however, are extremely rare in Africa. In sub-Saharan Africa outside the Calabar area (where they have been fairly common), only a few other ceramic headrests have been found in archaeological contexts: the one attributed to the Sao Culture in Chad and another from

the Upemba Depression (Kisalian Culture) in the Democratic Republic of Congo.⁹⁴

Abasi Edem Street (ca. 660 – 1140 A.D.)

In 1996, Ekpo Eyo directed an excavation (in which the writer took part), at Abasi Edem Street in Efut Abua, Calabar. The site contained three concentrations of artifacts aligned east-west, which together formed a crescent shape (Figs. 3.8-3.9). Two samples of charcoal found in association with pottery at Abasi Edem were radiocarbon dated by Teledyne Brown Engineering (Westwood, NJ) and later calibrated by Beta Analytic, Inc. (Miami, FL), again using the 2-Sigma method.

1) Teledyne I-18, 732	1220 +/- 80 BP	cal 660-990 AD
2) Teledyne I-18, 731	1090 +/- 80 BP	cal 770-1140 AD

The most important objects were located in Concentration A, at the eastern end. There, a terracotta male figurine of Type I was found reclining on a terracotta object identified as a tuyère, the pipe used to bring air into a forge to enhance combustion. The figurine is nearly complete, missing only the lowest portion of its base (Fig. 3.3). The discoid head faces upward with its chin thrust forward and wears a simple coiffure rendered with four small knobs. Along with the figurine were found a terracotta headrest; two pieces of copper-alloy jewelry (a coiled bracelet and a discoid bead); glass and polished stone beads (some associated with a piece of bone); several iron implements (including two short swords arranged to form an “X”); and a number terracotta vessels, including

⁹⁴ See Frank Herreman’s interview, “Ekpo Eyo,” in *Addendum: African Forms* (New York: Museum for African Art, 2001), 15-17; Roy Seiber, *African Furniture & Household Objects* (New York and Bloomington: The American Federation of Arts and Indiana University, 1980), 124; J. Nenquin, *Excavations at Sanga, 1957, the Protohistoric Necropolis* (Tervuren, 1963), pl. xx.

pedestal bowls and globular pots with elaborate decoration. Many of these terracottas, as at the Old Marian Road site, were turned sideways or upside-down, which again emphasized the designs. The other two concentrations contained terracotta pots exclusively.

The decorative patterns found on the terracottas are also similar to the Old Marian examples, with concentric circles, spirals, interlaces, interlocking lozenges, and skeuomorphic basket-weaving designs being especially prominent.

Slag, the by-product of iron-working, was scattered throughout the surface of the Abasi Edem site. Additional features included two firepits located just south of Concentration A, containing burnt terracotta fragments and slag.

The large amount of slag in the pits and scattered over the ground throughout the site seems to indicate that iron working took place there. The small pieces of burnt clay (not from pots) and miscellaneous potsherds recovered from the pits may be the remnants of potsherd-lined forge walls.

Ekpo Eypo believes the overt references to iron-working at this site—i.e. the possible forge; the slags and finished implements; the careful placement of a single male figurine over a tuyère—combined with the bone fragment associated with beads and the other personal items, strongly suggest that it was the burial place of a blacksmith.

The beads were almost certainly imported, for there is no local bead-making tradition to account for them. In fact, they resemble some of the thousands of beads

found by Thurstan Shaw at Igbo-Ukwu, which are related to long-distance trade with North Africa and possibly India.⁹⁵

Other Calabar Sites

It should be noted that Ekpo Eyo and staff members of the Old Residency Museum have conducted additional rescue operations in urban Calabar since the early 1990s. They found a large number of terracottas that are generally consistent with the material recovered from the sites mentioned here. A radiocarbon date from a site along Ndidem Usang Iso Street (Teledyne I-18, 466) yielded a result of 1190 +/- 90 B.P., or cal. 660-1020 A.D. (2-Sigma calibration by Beta Analytic).

Obot Okoho and Okang Mbang (ca. 1000-1450 A.D.)

In 1996, staff members of the Old Residency Museum received reports of an area just outside metropolitan Calabar from which a number of terracotta objects had been illicitly removed. Their investigations led to a plundered site in a small valley near Obot Okoho village (Fig. 3.10).⁹⁶ Recent diggings revealed the site extended from the roadbed down an adjacent hillside and throughout the floor of a small valley below. Much of the ground surface was disturbed in the course of the looting, which left a virtual carpet of potsherds over the site. While most of the intact pieces had been removed previously,

⁹⁵ See J. E. G. Sutton, "The international factor at Igbo-Ukwu," *The African Archaeological Review* 9 (1991), 145-160; Timothy Insoll and Thurstan Shaw, "Gao and Igbo-Ukwu: Beads, Interregional Trade, and Beyond," *African Archaeological Review* 14, 1 (1997), 9-23; J. E. G. Sutton, "Igbo-Ukwu and the Nile," *African Archaeological Review* 18, 1 (2001), 49-62.

⁹⁶ Ekpo Eyo, "1998 Archaeological Excavations in Calabar in Cross River Valley, South Eastern Nigeria," *West African Research Association Newsletter* (Fall 1999), 11.

Ekpo Eyo noticed the remaining fragments seemed to be organized in some fashion, that is, according to the original form of the object—heads and body fragments from anthropomorphic figurines were located together, as were vessel and headrest fragments. The broken-off heads of at least seventy different anthropomorphic figurines were collected, among hundreds of other fragments, by museum staff and a group from the University of Maryland, including the writer. Several pottery-making tools were found as well, in the form of water-worn quartz pebbles with a polished facet, which were used to smooth pots before they were fired.⁹⁷ No other types of artifacts were recovered (iron implements, for example, were conspicuously absent compared to the sites located within urban Calabar where they have been fairly common). The intentional arrangement of the objects by type, the stone tools, and the fact that raw clay was available locally,⁹⁸ led Ekpo Eyo to interpret the site as a pottery factory.⁹⁹ No firing site was located, but it may be noted that the methods for firing pottery in southern Nigeria involve burning the pots within piles of brush on the ground surface rather than in kilns. If the site was used for a short time only, the evidence of firing would have vanished in the heavy summer rains.

Eyo's interpretation is supported by information provided by the Qua Chief Mbora of Big Qua Town, Calabar, who reported that a well-known potter called Okang Mbang once lived and worked there.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ P. A. Talbot, remarking on pottery production in the Cross River region in the early twentieth century, noted, "The surface [of the pots] is polished with a stone . . .", *Peoples of Southern Nigeria*, v. III, 933.

⁹⁸ The raw clay from Obot Okoho has not yet been analyzed scientifically, but samples have been collected and analysis is planned by the Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

⁹⁹ Eyo, "1998 Archaeological Excavations in Calabar in Cross River Valley, South Eastern Nigeria," 11.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

A second site was found just one-half mile away and is also called Okang Mbang. This land was formerly owned by the Qua people, but now belongs to an Efik family.¹⁰¹ The site is located on a hilltop, which local residents told Eyo was the home of a water spirit called Anwa Nsaharak until the government built a road through the hill to the nearby cattle market at Nassarawa village, which the local people believe caused the spirit to flee.¹⁰² The spirit's abode is indicated by a large tree overlooking a steep hillside. At the base of the tree were excavated numerous terracotta objects of the same type as found at Obot Okoho. The area had eroded so that many objects were exposed on the ground surface and within the debris that had tumbled down the hillside. Some small rounded quartz stones were also collected here. They were worn smooth by moving water but had no polished facets and so were probably not tools like the stones found at Obot Okoho. However, because the soil there was naturally free of such stones, their presence means they had been brought in, perhaps from the nearby streambed, and so were evidently sacrificial offerings to the water spirit. Similar practices are described in colonial-era sources.¹⁰³

In 1997 and 1999, I assisted in the recovery of hundreds of mostly fragmentary terracottas from these sites and other locations in the area. The finds included vessels, headrests, and anthropomorphic figurines such as those found at Okang Mbang nearby.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ See John Parkinson, "A Note on the Efik and Ekoi Tribes of the Eastern Province of Southern Nigeria," *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* XXXVII (1907), 266 re: flat quartz pebbles as "medicines"; Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria*, v. III, 780, "...the Nimm stones, or round, egg-like pebbles" [Nimm is a water spirit]; D. Talbot, *Women's Mysteries of a Primitive People*, 13-14.

One prominent type of fragment, the detached pedestal base of a small bowl, stood out to me because of the tremendous variety of decorative motifs they displayed (although some were also left plain). This material became the focus of the current study, and is described in Chapter Four.

In the years since, Calabar museum personnel have identified further sites in the same general area, in the process recovering numerous objects from the ground and seizing others from illicit traders. I returned to Obot Okoho in 2002 and saw evidence that looting there had continued.

Dating

Ekpo Eyo submitted for radiocarbon (^{14}C) analysis two charcoal samples found in association with pottery at the hilltop site at Okang Mbang (Obot Okoho was too heavily disturbed by looting to produce reliable carbon samples for dating). The Okang Mbang samples yielded results of 850 ± 80 BP and 690 ± 125 BP; 2-Sigma calibration indicates the date of the first sample lies between 1020-1290 AD, while the second lies between 1050-1440 AD.¹⁰⁴ Thus, the sites located outside of urban Calabar would appear to be somewhat more recent than the sites located within. However, because three of the urban *terminus ante quem* dates overlap with the Okang Mbang *terminus post quem* dates, Okang Mbang may represent a continuation of the Calabar traditions.

Furthermore, some privately-owned examples of anthropomorphic figurines and detached heads in the style of Obot Okoho/Okang Mbang area (Type III) have been dated

¹⁰⁴ Teledyne I-18, 918 (850 ± 80 BP), calibrated 1020-1290 AD; Teledyne I-18, 919 (690 ± 125 BP), calibrated 1050-1440 AD (calibration by Beta Analytic).

by thermoluminescence testing (TL), presumably at the bequest of art dealers seeking to establish the objects' antiquity prior to sale. It must be noted that the results of such TL tests are problematic in the sense that they were conducted on objects lacking archaeological context, such as the field data necessary to establish background radiation levels, which therefore makes the results of such TL tests less reliable.¹⁰⁵ The four TL lab reports I have seen offer dates between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries AD, while claims of tenth-eleventh century dates have also been published, though without citation—I assume some of these dates also resulted from TL dating.¹⁰⁶ The problems of context notwithstanding, the TL dates do appear to corroborate the radiocarbon dates received by Ekpo Eyo for the Okang Mbang site.

Stylistic evidence, in the case of the figurines in particular, also suggests a later date for Okang Mbang terracottas vis-à-vis the municipal finds. In particular, the figurines found outside Calabar combine the major formal traits of the two quite distinct figurine types recovered in municipal Calabar. There are also some key differences in the relative distribution of terracotta forms in the two areas. This will be detailed later.

Another major difference between these terracottas and much of the urban Calabar finds is the ceramic fabric itself. Objects from Obot Okoho and Okang Mbang were typically made from a rather course, gritty clay paste, which yielded a relatively

¹⁰⁵ See McIntosh and McIntosh, 479-80.

¹⁰⁶ For example, see Karl-Ferdinand Schaedler, *Earth and Ore: 2500 Years of African Art in Terracotta and Metal* (Munich: Panterra Verlag, 1997), 248; Douglas Dawson, "Qua or Calabar Culture," in *Of the Earth: Ancient and Historic African Ceramics* (Chicago: Douglas Dawson Gallery, 2001), np; Anitra Nettleson, "Qua Terracottas," in ed. Anitra Nettleson, *Nigerian Art: The Meneghelli Collection* (South Africa: Totem Galleries, 2002), 218-219 (considering the number of blatant copies included in the last work, the Calabar examples might be viewed with some skepticism).

thick and brittle buff-colored clay body after firing. This ware is also found within Calabar, but the denser, thinner red-ware typical of the urban sites such as Abasi Edem and Old Marian Road is rare—but not unknown—in the area of Obot Okoho/Okang Mbang. Therefore, at least two different centers of production were in operation.

Other Archaeological Sites in the Cross River Region

As mentioned above, Nicklin reported a number of sites throughout the lower Cross River region and even extending into Cameroon (Mbakang village), which, if investigated by archaeologists, might add tremendously to our knowledge of Cross River history.

Ekpo Eyo conducted a rescue operation on the grounds of the Oron Museum in the early 1990s. There he found a number of terracottas similar to those from Calabar, including a headrest and decorated bowls (Figs. 3.11-3.12).

In 2002, Ekpo Eyo excavated a site at Ikang, an important coastal trading center southeast of Calabar near Cameroon. The writer also took part in this excavation, but it would be improper to describe the site at this time pending Eyo's analysis.

Nevertheless, it is clear that the distribution of Calabar-style terracottas extends beyond the Qua areas of Calabar as originally reported, to the north at least to the area of Obot Okoho and southwards into the lands now occupied by the Efut, across the river into Oron, and perhaps into adjacent lands now occupied by the Ibibio.

Two other archaeological sites in southeastern Nigeria should also be mentioned because their dating is comparable: Igbo-Ukwu (eighth to eleventh century A.D.) and the

Afikpo Abandoned Habitation Site (eighth to seventeenth century A.D.), which are northwest of Calabar.¹⁰⁷

Igbo-Ukwu was comprised of three distinct sites, namely the tomb (Igbo Richard), the shrine (Igbo Isaiah), and the repository (Igbo Jonah). Igbo Richard contained the body of a highly-placed individual, likened to a priest-king, in a tomb containing thousands of beads in addition to bronze and ivory ornaments. Igbo Isaiah yielded many elaborately decorated bronze and ceramic vessels in addition to thousands of beads. The Igbo Jonah site contained additional metal pieces and ornaments, as well as pottery including the famous large globular pot decorated with deeply grooved lines, concentric circles, linear motifs with looped ends, and applied zoomorphic figures (Fig. 3.13). While these motifs are very similar to the Calabar material, neither of the two most characteristic Calabar ceramic forms—headrests and anthropomorphic figurines—was found at Igbo-Ukwu.

Over the past century, Afikpo has been the greatest pottery-production center of the Cross River region. Afikpo pottery is still brought to Calabar and the shapes of some pots made there (such as pedestal bowls) resemble the ancient Calabar material. Therefore, Afikpo has been considered a possible location for the production of some ancient terracottas found at Calabar. But much more work needs to be done to prove this.

Keeping these sites in mind, let us now take a closer look at the terracottas of Oboto Okoho and Okang Mbang.

¹⁰⁷ See Thurstan Shaw, *Igbo Ukwu: An Account of Archaeological Discoveries in Eastern Nigeria*, 2 vols. (Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1970) and Vincent Chikwendu, *Afikpo Excavations, May-June, 1975* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Birmingham, UK, 1976).

CHAPTER FOUR

DECORATED TERRACOTTAS FROM OBOT OKOHO AND OKANG MBANG, CA. 1000-1450 A.D.

The terracotta objects found at Obot Okoho, Okang Mbang, and some examples from other nearby sites will be treated together here because the works from that area collectively are so similar in terms of manufacturing technique, fabric, form, and decoration—in other words, they evidence a consistent artistic style. Thus, the visual evidence suggests the terracottas from the area of Obot Okoho and Okang Mbang date from the same general time period and broad cultural context. Like the terracottas found within Calabar itself, the examples from Obot Okoho and the surrounding area can be divided into three major classes based on morphology: headrests, vessels, and anthropomorphic figurines. Of these, I will concentrate most on certain types of vessels (decorated bowls and jars) and the anthropomorphic figurines, as their decoration offers the greatest number and variety of designs comparable to *nsibidi* and like motifs.

Headrests

Like all Calabar headrests, those from the area of Obot Okoho are hollow (Figs. 4.1-4.2). They are quadrangular in profile and often taper outward from top to bottom, while bulging at the middle. They typically have one side pierced with a large circular opening with a pair of smaller holes directly above it, which gives the impression of a hungry, open-mouthed face. This side often has groups of parallel lines arranged at various angles around the central opening. The other side is usually solid, with parallel horizontal grooves that may be impressed with short marks with a reeded appearance.

Often a vertical linear motif with looped ends is placed at the center. The sides often display a tall vertical interlace. The undecorated top is slightly concave and may project outward all around, but usually more so at the sides. The base is undecorated.

Vessels

Vessels found at these sites include circular bowls with pedestal (or ring) bases that may be described as “small,” “medium,” or “large” according to their size and form, although there may be some overlap among the groups because the pieces are hand-built and not at all uniform in appearance. But in most cases the small bowls that form the core of this study are less than 18 centimeters in diameter at the rim and 10 centimeters in height; while the largest bowls approach 30 centimeters across the rim and 15 centimeters in height. Also found were globular pots and jars of various forms and sizes (though most are incomplete or fragmented), which can also be elaborately decorated.

Small Bowls

A profile view of several of these small, usually buff-colored bowls illustrates their formal variability (Fig. 4.3). The walls may be short and nearly vertical, flare outward from the base, or exhibit varying degrees of curvature or carination. Nearly all of them have a pierced lug that likely served as an anchor to attach a string loop from which the bowl hung, as seen in historical sources.¹⁰⁸ Thus, considering a site such as Okang Mbang, the bowls may have been displayed with their decorated bases visible for

¹⁰⁸ P. A. Talbot, *In the Shadow of the Bush* (New York: George Doran, 1912), pl. facing 114; Daryl Forde, *Yakö Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), pl. VIb (plates, bowls, and a decorated calabash vessel hanging from an interior house wall in the Ugep area of the middle Cross River region).

some period of time before they were deposited. While the interiors of these small bowls are not decorated, the outsides of most display a range of incised decoration including parallel grooves, multiple arcs, meanders, interlaces, hatching, rouletting and stippling, usually in stock patterns that encircle the full diameter of the bowl (Figs. 4.4-4.5). When grooving is used, the design often ends in a closed loop at the lug (Fig. 4.6). Instead of having such all-over designs, a relatively small number of bowls instead reveal discrete motifs, such as interlaces, angles, arcs, lozenges, or concentric circles placed equidistantly around the body (Fig. 4.7); while others display panels filled with decoration that radiate out from the base in a cruciform layout (Fig. 4.8).

The bases were usually molded separately from the bowl itself and then added to it before firing. This helps to explain why so many of them survived intact. The bases often broke cleanly from the bowls along the join and their thick, flat shape—being inherently less prone to breakage than the thin walls of the bowl itself—contributed to their preservation over time.

While some pedestal bases are plain, most are decorated by incision, using a seemingly endless reservoir of geometric designs. Indeed, of the several hundred examples gathered for this study, no two are quite the same in terms of their decoration and this, certainly, is a testament to the creativity of the artists who made them. Yet, within this great diversity of motifs, there are “families” of similar patterns that show up repeatedly (e.g. concentric circles, spiral, interlace, opposed/conjoined arcs/angles, lozenge, cruciform, etc.). Sixteen such categories are described below. Other designs are represented with a single example at present, but continued investigation may yield similar pieces in the future. By far the most common of the designs are concentric circles

and spirals, which combined, account for nearly half of the several hundred decorated bases seen during the course of this study.

Frequently juxtaposing parallel lines, arcs, and angles, the base patterns can be dazzling to the eye. The images often appear to overlap and intertwine in seemingly innumerable combinations, while negative space and a fill pattern of repeated tiny rows of stippled dots add contrast and a sense of depth to the design. Because of their complexity and because each particular example is different even if it falls within a “family” of similar patterns, they often present a challenge to neat scholarly classification. In fact, some examples could equally occupy two or more of the categories I use to describe them. Other designs, as will be shown, are not easily quantified by a short descriptive title. And in sharp contrast to the predominant, carefully measured symmetrical patterns are some boldly asymmetrical examples (figs.4.91-4.94) and a few much simpler designs, some of which are executed in a loose “freehand” style (fig. 4.29). Therefore, considering the multiplicity of possible interpretations, the design categories below are offered only for descriptive purposes—the ceramicists who made them may not have conceived of their work in the same way.

Small Bowls: Base Decoration

Concentric circles

Concentric circles are the most common base design found at Obot Okoho and surrounding areas. They may appear centrally on the base as the main image, (Figs. 4.9-4.11) or in multiple configurations, sometimes placed around a larger central one (Figs. 4.12-4.13). The main circle design may be framed by additional motifs, such as arcs or

groups of parallel lines radiating outward (Figs. 4.14-4.17). One striking example has a strong cruciform quality in its radial arrangement of parallel lines alternating with lozenges (Fig. 4.18).

Spiral

The spiral represents the second-most common design found on bases from this area (Figs. 4.19-4.23). But unlike the motif of concentric circles, the spiral is often found alone, without additional elements (one exception is has the main spiral framed with confronted arcs in a cruciform arrangement, complimented by the design of the body with its multiple arcs) (Fig. 4.23). The spiral may terminate cleanly at the center or, displaying a remarkable attention to detail, wrap around itself and continue again outward as an “infinite” spiral (Fig. 4.22).

Whorl

This group features a swirled design apparently produced by using a comb as a compass (Fig. 4.24). Imagine rotating the comb about a central point as if to create concentric circles, but after about 270 degrees of rotation, rather than completing the circle, the comb is pulled downward leaving a “whorl” pattern.

Interlace

Interlace patterns appear in numerous iterations. For example, there are discrete figures-of-eight in either curvilinear or angular styles (Figs. 4.25-4.28), or the much more loosely drawn knot seen in Fig. 4.29. Another interlace encircles the base like a frame (Fig. 4.30). Some feature a mirrored pair of interlace motifs (Figs. 4.31-4.32). Many

others show conjoined arcs or angles, which are the fundamental units of a repeated interlace pattern (Figs. 4.33-4.36). These designs often extend to the edge of the base, thereby implying their continuation into imagined space. The conjoined motifs may appear as a single unit composed of parallel lines (Fig. 4.35), while others are elaborated with framing devices and stippling (Fig. 4.36). Additional examples show a “bow” design, which may be considered the terminal segment of a closed interlace pattern (Figure 4.37).

Confronted Arcs/Angles

This design features a major arc or angle composed of multiple lines whose concavity encloses or faces another, (usually) smaller one (Figs. 4.38-4.41). Groups of parallel lines and additional smaller arcs/angles may be found around the edge of the rim.

Other examples feature series of smaller confronted angles. One contains a large empty area, thereby leaving the design uncharacteristically off-center (Fig. 4.42), while two others contains a large arc in that area, which visually balances the composition (Figs. 4.43-4.44).

Opposed Arcs/Angles

Perhaps representing the metaphorical opposite of the conjoined arcs/angles just described are the relatively less common examples featuring opposed arcs/angles, i.e. with their concave sides facing outward (Figs 4.45-4.46). The main elements may be connected by smaller ones (Figs. 4.47, 4.49), thereby forming an interlace (Fig. 4.48).

Repeated Arcs/Angles

This design consists of a series of running arcs or angles (i.e. the motifs are aligned in the same direction), with stippled dots filling the intervals (Figs. 4.50-4.51).

Lozenge

Lozenge (or diamond) designs also appear in many variations. They often display multiple lozenges-within-lozenges embellished with groups of parallel lines and/or stippling (Figs. 4.52-4.57). One example with a strong concentric aspect has circles placed at the four intersections and another at center (Fig. 4.57), thereby creating an implied cruciform or cross, recalling the more overt cruciforms of the next group.

Cruciform

Cruciform designs may incorporate closely spaced parallel lines forming either perpendicular crosses or non-perpendicular x-forms (Figs 4.58-4.62). One of the latter types is further enhanced with concentric circles and arcs (Fig. 4.60), while others display angles repeated within the interstices of the cross arms (Figs. 4.61-4.62). Other bases display cruciforms implied in the central negative space created by four arc or angle motifs placed radially about the rim of the base (Figs. 4.63-4.64). Another example displays a cruciform of hatched lines in relief flanked by two small raised lenticular devices, which may represent cowrie shells, a precolonial form of currency (Figure 4.65).

Star

Bases containing multi-point geometric figures are called “stars” for the sake of convenience. One shows an asymmetric four-point star with concentric circles at its center (Fig. 4.66). Others display five-point stars of various configurations (Figs. 4.67-4.68), while one presents a nine-point star rendered in simple outline (Fig. 4.69).

Central Straight Lines

This group shares a central motif consisting of groups of parallel straight lines (Figs. 4.70-4.71). The central lines may be accompanied by groups of short parallel lines set at oblique angles at both ends, which may be connected by arcs or angles (Figs 4.72-4.75). One example bearing a strongly defined central group of lines having closed ends is embellished with very lightly incised groups of thin arcs above and below (Fig. 4.76).

Wavy Lines

A few bases are decorated primarily with either curvilinear or angular wavy lines (Figs. 4.77-4.80). The meanders are at times rendered in an unusual and very loose “freehand” style. One such example is further distinguished by the decoration of the body (Fig 4.81). In contrast to most small bowls, which typically display stock patterns on the exterior, this one has a design of arcs arranged in discrete figures that change from one to another; hence, what starts as a roughly circular motif on one side gradually becomes, as one turns the pot around, a complete figure-of-eight interlace (Fig. 4.82).

Interwoven Lines

Two bases exhibit designs composed of groups of short parallel lines placed at various angles, giving the impression they are woven together (Figs. 4.83-4.84).

Grid

This design is composed of nine (or more rarely, four) alternating sections of parallel horizontal and vertical lines, which create a grid or checkerboard pattern (Fig. 4.85). Alternatively, the design may be viewed as a weaving skeuomorph.

Filled Strip

This group features a decorated “strip” placed across the center of the base demarcated by parallel lines and filled with patterns evocative of weaving (Figs. 4.86-4.90). In most cases, the space outside the strip is undecorated.

Asymmetric Composite Designs

Some bases feature highly individualistic and asymmetric designs composed of groups of curving and parallel straight lines set at irregular angles (Figs. 4.91-4.94). One example reveals a simpler style and depicts an arc facing a slightly larger linear figure with a closed loop on one end (Figure 4.94).

Medium Bowls

Bowls with interior decoration

This slightly larger type of buff-colored bowl, having a pedestal base and a gently curving profile, is decorated quite differently than the small bowls just reviewed. Shown here are two examples (Figs. 4.95-4.96). This class of bowl is unusual not only for its interior decoration, but for the consistency of its decorative scheme. In all examples studied (there are many fragments of this type of bowl), the exterior is inscribed with sets of parallel grooves placed widely apart, while the interior carries an interlace at the rim.

That this type of bowl does not display the variety of designs seen on others makes an important point. In other words, it illustrates that Calabar terracottas are not all decorated in the same manner regardless of form—there are in fact certain type-specific artistic conventions that governed the way each sort of object was to be decorated.

Large Bowls

This class of bowls includes two main subgroups. The first comprises buff-colored bowls having a relatively wide pedestal base, sloping walls, a low shoulder, and a curved and slightly inverted rim, which makes for a somewhat squat profile (Figs. 4.97-4.99). The exterior is often decorated with sweeping arcs, angles, and bands of parallel lines. The bases typically display concentric circles or spirals.

The second group contains wide-mouthed bowls that are buff to red in color with a small but relatively tall pedestal base, steep walls, a high shoulder, and a sharply angled rim (Fig. 4.100). The decoration features large-scale motifs, such as concentric circles or interlocking lozenges, usually set in four panels that together form a cruciform pattern.

Jars

Jars may be described as vessels with a vertical orientation, a high neck, and a mouth that is narrower than the shoulder (the widest part of a vessel). Thus, jars have a “closed” mouth as opposed to the “open” mouth of a bowl, which may be its widest feature. The two main types of decorated jars from the Obot Okoho/Okang Mbang area discussed here are quite different iconographically. The first carries skeuomorphic weaving designs, either as an all-over pattern enveloping the vessel (Figs. 4.102-4.103), or in a band around the middle combined with horizontal grooving (Fig. 4.104). The second type features discrete motifs evocative of body decoration and so they might represent a kind of anthropomorphic vessel (Fig. 4.105-4.105a). However, they are distinguished from the anthropomorphic “figurines” described below by their lack of separately modeled heads and arms. The issue is confused by the fact that many are incomplete at the top, which makes it difficult to ascertain whether they were originally finished with an open rim or a modeled head.

In any case, the decorative scheme of these jars is similar to that of figurines that have kept their heads. The main designs generally occupy a panel on the body of the jar, demarcated by strong, often raised horizontal lines (Fig. 4.106). The upper line may have a larger, raised device at center that suggests a large bead strung on a necklace. Usually there are vertical elements on either side of this panel, which separates it from the reverse. In some cases, angled lines appear in front of these vertical lines, which recall similar elements on the figurines with heads described below, and which appear to represent an arms-akimbo gesture as seen on the Type I figurines.

The front panel often displays a combination of geometric designs, including circles, groups of lines, interlaces, meanders, arcs/angles, lozenges, and cruciforms (Figs. 4.107-4.116). Many also exhibit crescentic motifs designed in such a manner that they strongly resemble the iron hoe and needle currencies formerly used in Southeastern Nigeria (especially Figs. 4.107, 4.116).¹⁰⁹ One example exhibits a striking cruciform design created by a series of grooved lines emanating from the outside corners of the central panel, which then converge and interlock at the center to form a bold “X.” Radiating from the four central angles of intersection are large crescentic/“hoe” devices, while smaller related forms occupy each quadrant of the panel. A single figure-of-eight interlace is located near the lower left corner. Above the main decorated panel are two hollow raised circles, which center an enclosed band of additional circles forming a beaded line around the neck.

The visual impact of this design is enhanced by the contrast provided by stippling. Used as a fill pattern, the design of tiny circles was made by repeatedly pressing the surface with something like a thin hollow plant stem. This creates shadows that darken the background, effectively bringing the main elements into sharp relief.

The reverse of this figurine is unusual because it is decorated (Fig. 4.120). The design is an asymmetric one similar to the smaller bi-directional crescentic motifs on the obverse, but is larger in scale and includes a repetition of the left-end device. The entire motif is curiously off-center, with the emphasis placed the far left, leaving the right side displaying only the stippled background pattern. The “arrowhead” on the left end

¹⁰⁹ Ekpo Eyo, *Nigeria and the Evolution of Money* (Lagos: Central Bank of Nigeira, 1979), 51, 54; Talbot, *In the Shadow of the Bush*, pl. facing 126.

appears to be incomplete, and this, along with its off-center position, creates a feeling of movement such that the motif appears to be exiting the reverse panel. While this particular design is unique, other examples of asymmetry in the decoration of Calabar terracottas have been noted, though they are relatively uncommon compared to symmetric compositions.

Anthropomorphic Figurines

Almost all of the anthropomorphic figurines collected from the Oboto Okoho/Okang Mbang area comprise a single formal type, one that is different from the Types I and II figurines previously described, and so they are deemed Type III. A single intact and fully naturalistic female figurine represents Type IV.

Type III Figurines

The anthropomorphic figurines found at Oboto Okoho and Okang Mbang constitute a formal type that combines certain features of the first two types found in urban Calabar. For example, they take the basic upturned vessel form as in Type II, to which is added a distinct head resembling those Type I, but often with the more elaborate coiffure or headdress (Fig. 4.121-4.124) of Type II. Some examples also have braceleted arms modeled in the round and the hands-on-hips gesture characteristic of Type I. The geometric decoration, again placed centrally on the torso and within a well-defined panel, again recalls the Type II convention. In general, however, Type III figurines are larger and more elaborate in terms of their modeling and decoration than either Type I or II.

Type III figurines exhibit two very different modes of depicting the head. One group features a human face in any number of styles, but usually having a scutiform or ovoid shape with a jutting chin and simple facial features modeled in low relief, like the head of the Type I example found at Abasi Edem Street (Figs. 3.3, 4.121, 4.125-4.128).

The other group is much less naturalistic, with heads modeled in an abstract mode (fig. 4.122-4.123, 4.124). They resemble Type II figurines in that facial features appear on the neck of the vessel rather than on a separately modeled face. Yet, with what seem to be very widely spaced eyes (or perhaps ears) situated well below an open “mouth,” they present curious humans indeed, if in fact human beings are the intended referent. Some lack identifiable facial features altogether, but their decoration and general configuration, including a head shape with coiffure/headdress and the occasional sculpted arms, remain as anthropomorphic signifiers. Considering this intentional and quite obvious distinction from the more naturalistic figurines, they may represent otherworldly beings.

Figurines from this more abstract group feature headdresses in a variety of styles. Some have a globular form with incised horizontal grooving (Fig. 4.132, top left), while others resemble a feather headdress (Fig. 4.129) or tiered crown (Figs 4.130-4.13). Another group of heads are shaped like mushroom caps, with many tightly-spaced small knobs for the hair and an open area at the front that may represent the forehead (Fig. 4.132, lower right).

Type III figurines of both groups are instantly recognizable for their bold designs arranged centrally on the torso, while the back is less frequently decorated. Like the jars just described, the designs are placed more or less symmetrically about the vertical axis,

within a quadrangular panel extending from the base of the neck down to some point below the midline of the bulbous torso, but never extending to the base itself (as in Type II figurines).

A common decorative scheme is a series of high-relief parallel vertical ridges—typically three—aligned on the abdomen (Fig. 4.133). At the top and on either side of these ridges are commonly found smaller diagonals, which create a sort of “arrowhead” or “directional” motif. At the bottom, a horizontal ridged or incised linear “base” spans the width of the panel, demarcating its lower edge. Alternatively, raised or grooved crescentic/”hoe” forms appear at the top or at both ends of the central verticals, pointing up and/or down (Fig. 4.121). Along the right and left sides of the middle ridges are placed skeuomorphic cowrie shells, individually or in small clusters, over a background comb-stippled in a herringbone pattern.

That so many of these surviving figurines are incomplete makes it difficult to ascertain how or if the decoration on the body is related to the style of the head. In other words, whether the Type III figurines of each group have their own distinctive modes of decoration, as do the various types of vessels found in association with them.

Type IV: A Female Figurine

It was thought the many fragments of arms, heads, and elaborate hairstyles collected in the Obot Okoho/Okang Mbang area came from Type III figurines exclusively. That is, until a complete and strikingly naturalistic female figure was brought to the attention of the Old Residency Museum. A chance find in the Odukpani area (about ten miles north of Obot Okoho), the individual who discovered this figure

claims it is one of a pair with the other representing a man (Figs. 4.134-4.136).¹¹⁰ The female image is now conserved at the Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

The figurine's head, with its scutiform face, projecting chin, simplified features, and hair elaborately dressed into projecting cones, is rendered in a style comparable to many Type III figurines from Obot Okoho/Okang Mbang and also resembles fragments of arms, heads, and coiffure from that area, which previously were considered to be from Type III works. Some of these fragments, therefore, may have belonged to the more naturalistic Type IV works.

The female image sits, virtually nude, upon a stool with hands placed on her legs. She wears beads about her neck and hips, while her bracelets and anklets appear to represent copper-alloy manillas rather than beads. A large pendant ornament decorated with what look like cowrie shells hangs from her necklace. Her body is further adorned with circles, curving lines, and a design composed of repeated angles that form a herringbone pattern (though occasionally the motifs overlap). Her grand appearance brings to mind the traditional institution in the Cross River region, colloquially called the "fattening house," which prepares young women for marriage and adult life. Surprisingly, the designs on her arms echo the decoration of an Efik maiden photographed during the early colonial period, who is about to enter her period of seclusion and training (Fig. 4.137). This ceremony is mentioned again in Chapter Six.

To sum, the figurines in the Calabar region from the latter part of the first millennium A.D. were rather subtle expressions—small, relatively unadorned iconic

¹¹⁰ Personal communication with N. Mayo Adediran, Curator, Old Residency Museum, Calabar (April 2004).

forms (i.e. Type I). Later, they seem to have been replaced by larger and more elaborately designed works over time (i.e. Types. It is clear that formal characteristics and iconography are correlated to geographic location and chronology (I admit the undated Type IV example is problematic in this regard, but its excellent condition suggests it is relatively recent). The more elaborately decorated works, perhaps, were meant to be seen by an audience including individuals who, depending on their position in society, were more or less informed about the objects' visual language—perhaps the use of increasingly complex iconography corresponds to concurrent developments within the institutions that used it, such as the cults charged with the veneration of water spirits, as evidenced at Okang Mbang. Analogous documented institutions would include, for example, water-spirit cults such as Nnimm among the Ejagham, Ndem among the Efik, and Mami Wata, which is associated with foreign trade and found widely along the African coast. Mami Wata shrines in particular are known for their elaborate assemblages of fancy objects.

Considering then more broadly the entire corpus of archaeological ceramics from the Calabar region, a few traits stand out. For one, there was a tremendous number of terracotta objects were in circulation, including vessels of various forms and modes of decoration, headrests, and anthropomorphic figurines. Many of them were similarly decorated, using a specific iconography of geometric and curvilinear designs. Though perhaps obvious, this point should not to be overlooked. While certain forms or specific patterns may be uncommon, the overall great number of decorated terracottas attests to their original prominence in society—they were not the rare treasures of a few. They were often grouped together in large numbers in contexts indicative of ceremonial

importance, such as burials (e.g. Abasi Edem) and shrines (e.g. Okang Mbang). Within these contexts, the designs were made more visible to those present by the intentional tilting or inversion of the terracottas on which they prominently appear.

But in order to gain a better idea of what the designs may represent and in what contexts similar objects have been included, it will be helpful now to examine the historical record for evidence of analogous practices.

CHAPTER FIVE

FROM CONTACT TO COLONIALISM: SOURCES FOR VISUAL CULTURE OF THE CROSS RIVER REGION DURING THE TRANSATLANTIC TRADE AND THE RISE OF OLD CALABAR, CA. 1600-1885

The walls all round the court are adorned with a variety of extravagant designs of apocryphal animals; impossible crocodiles, possessing a flexibility in their outlines as is never seen in the living specimens; leopards with six feet; birds with horns from their tails. Diamond, and crescent, and cruciform shapes of vari-coloured hues abound wherever there is a spot to paint them on.

Thomas Hutchinson, 1858

After the establishment of Old Calabar as a major port in the transatlantic trade, the lower Cross River area witnessed an increasing European presence that was generally at odds with local practices and beliefs. Of course, competing European interests grew so lucrative across the continent that outright colonization would be seen as the best means to protect them. As part of the wider European enterprises of the transatlantic trade and later colonialism and Christian evangelization (after 1846), a number of individuals—almost exclusively Europeans—who worked in the Lower Cross River area took the opportunity to record their observations of local life and customs. We have seen how their writings were at times ambivalent concerning Africans and their culture, praising some things while denigrating others. We have also seen how negative views affected Western perceptions of Africans because they appealed to a widely held sense of superiority over so-called “primitive” races. G. A. Robertson, after visiting the “Kingdom of Qua” at “old Calebar,” essentially called for its colonization in 1819:

The remedy for this [Leopard Society masquerade] and other disgusting

traits in the African character is the *introduction of civilization*, —the arts, conveniences, and comforts of civilized society; an improvement in their morals and minds, both of male and female, must be the necessary result.¹¹¹

To the extent that such accounts were meant to justify their authors' particular agendas, and are therefore perhaps too easily dismissed in light of current understanding, they nonetheless constitute an invaluable body of work. In their descriptions of so many local practices, one can find much important information about African visual culture, including, for example, references to artistic endeavors such as masquerade performances, the furnishing and decoration of shrines and buildings, and personal adornment, to name just a few that are particularly relevant here. Thus, is Robertson's observation that the Leopard Society masqueraders, "throw their bodies into the most distorted attitudes,"¹¹² merely a stilted comment on a vigorous dance or could it be a fairly truthful description of Leopard Society *nsibidi* miming?

Calabar, as key port in the transatlantic trade, benefits from nearly four hundred years of written history. Consequently, the rise of the Efik polities and their involvement in the Atlantic world is fairly well understood. On the other hand, very little was written about other local ethnic groups (e.g. the Qua, Efut, Ibibio and others from the Old Calabar hinterland) from the early days of European contact until the later nineteenth century, when increased British missionary and colonial efforts brought inland Cross River peoples into direct contact with Europeans. From that point on, the number of written sources (and photographic images) that document and to a greater or lesser extent

¹¹¹ G. A. Robertson, *Notes on Africa; Particularly Those Parts Which are Situated Between Cape Verd and the River Congo* (London, 1819), 316.

¹¹² Robertson, 316.

investigate local visual culture increased greatly. Therefore, the period following the Berlin Conference and establishment of a formal British colonial presence in Nigeria in 1885 (the Oil Rivers Protectorate) is dealt with in Chapter Six.

Here I will present information from a number of precolonial sources on Calabar and the Cross River region, concentrating on accounts that provide details of art historical interest that may be related to the archaeological terracottas (e.g. body decoration, architectural ornament, pottery) and, when possible, their place in contexts (e.g. shrine assemblages, funerary rites). I also discuss a group of related ivory horns that evidently were made in the lower Cross River region and which appeared in European “curiosity cabinets”¹¹³ significantly earlier than can be explained by conventional history.

It should be stated that in these early documents, no explicit description of pottery is made that could be identified with the kinds of objects that have been excavated around Calabar, which in any case may have gone out of production before the Europeans arrived. Regardless, African pottery in general was not mentioned very much by early European visitors, perhaps because “native” pots held no commercial value for them—they were traders after all and African pottery was cheap and ubiquitous. There is also the likelihood that early traders were not privy to the ceremonial contexts that would have featured ceramic figurines and special pots, in part because they rarely left the confines of their ships anchored offshore. Thus, European sources contain few remarks about the local pottery of Calabar until the nineteenth century, when ethnographic observation in general became more frequent, a practice that was concurrent with the rise of

¹¹³ On curiosity cabinets, see Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor, *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), especially Ch. 29, “African Material in Early Collections,” by Ezio Bassani.

anthropology as a subject of inquiry. We do, however, have some records concerning the relative amounts and types of European ceramic wares brought to the area and from them it is clear that Calabar was a very strong market for imported ceramics from the late eighteenth century onward. The consequences of this demand, I believe, were considerable—though not necessarily in terms of how it affected the overall volume of local pottery production. Rather, I suggest that the imports affected foremost the production and use of a particular category of ceramics—those meant specifically for ritual use.

The Earliest European Sources for the Cross River

When, precisely, Europeans first made contact with the peoples of the lower Cross River or Calabar area remains a cloudy issue. The earliest mentions appear in Dutch and British records of the latter seventeenth century.¹¹⁴ Portuguese sources are strangely quiet about the Cross River, which they had named by 1514.¹¹⁵ Yet, despite the prolific British colonial-era scholar M. D. W. Jeffreys' compelling but otherwise unsubstantiated assertion that "The Portuguese . . . dared the terrors of the Bights and were soon well acquainted with the Calabar River and the surrounding natives,"¹¹⁶ modern historians generally agree that the area did not attract much European attention until the second half of the seventeenth century, that is, not until after the Portuguese lost

¹¹⁴ E.g. Watts (1672); see Latham, 17; Ardener, 23 and n. 42.

¹¹⁵ Ardener, 6.

¹¹⁶ M.D.W. Jeffreys, *Old Calabar and Notes on the Ibibio Language* (Calabar, H.W.T.I. Press, 1935), 4.

their maritime supremacy to the Dutch and British.¹¹⁷ However, the Portuguese did have business elsewhere near the Cross River, which could have had some impact on the situation of Calabar.

Consider again Pereira's ca. 1505 manuscript *Esmeraldo de Situ Orbis*, the navigational guide for mariners. It makes clear that Portuguese traders were using copper bracelets (manillas) to buy slaves and ivory to the west of Calabar in the Niger Delta at such places as Benin and Bonny (the latter town being about eighty miles from the Cross River), and also to the east along the coast facing Mt. Cameroon (approximately fifty miles from the Cross River).¹¹⁸

Pereira's original manuscript has not survived. But the two extant manuscript copies—both of which are somewhat later¹¹⁹—mention nothing of the nearly one hundred-mile stretch of coastline, including the Cross River, between the eastern Niger Delta and the Cameroon coast adjacent to Mt. Cameroon facing the island of Fernando Po. Concerning other areas of the African coast, Pereira was careful to list the major rivers and places of trade and even mentioned the presence of small rivers that are not otherwise worth his trouble to cite by name. So it seems odd that he would neglect to comment upon two large geographic features, the Cross River and its immediate neighbor the Rio del Rey, which he would have passed traveling beyond the Niger Delta on his

¹¹⁷ G. I. Jones, *The Trading States of the Oil Rivers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 34; Ardener, 17.

¹¹⁸ See J. D. Fage, "Commentary on Duarte Pacheco Pereira's Account of the Lower Guinea Coastlands in His *Esmeraldo de Situ Orbis*, and on Some Other Early Accounts," *History in Africa* 7 (1980), 70; E. J. Alagoa, "Long Distance Trade and States in the Niger Delta," *Journal of African History* 11 (1970), 319-29.

¹¹⁹ *Esmeraldo de Situ Orbis* by Duarte Pacheco Pereira, ed. George Kimble (1937, reprint Nendeln: Krause, 1967), xxx-xxxi.

way toward Fernando Po. We are also left to wonder about the contents of the map and sketches to which Pereira refers in his text but which are not found in the two extant copies. The historian George Kimble concluded that due to Portuguese national interests, “there can be little reasonable doubt that the *Esmeraldo* was censored; its map of the world and its numerous unique sketches—‘pintado pella natural’—were of far too great importance to remain open to public inspection.”¹²⁰

The 1518 Castilian manuscript by Martin Enciso (a translation of the Portuguese original written earlier that year by the pilot Andreas Pires), briefly describes the length of coastline east of the Niger Delta to the “Cape of Fernando Po,” i.e. the coast facing Mt. Cameroon just mentioned.¹²¹ This region is said to contain three large rivers, two of which would therefore seem to be the Cross River and the Rio del Rey, though they are not named here either. Pires’ text displays a certain degree of familiarity with the people of this area, as it mentions the use of “Cocos” (i.e. coconuts); a kind of palm wine; both iron and steel; and cloth made from palm fiber. The writer’s comment that the area is “a land of much gold,” however, is something of an overstatement, although small quantities of gold have been found in the Rio del Rey, about twenty miles east of the Cross River.¹²² Regardless of the veracity of such a statement, it is obvious that Pires believed the area should be visited again, as would his readers.

Latham offers evidence culled from some early European sources to explain why

¹²⁰ Kimble, xxx.. Kimble notes that one Barbosa Machado claimed to have seen the original manuscript in the eighteenth century and it contained eighteen illuminated maps and some sketches at that time.

¹²¹ See Ardener, 6-7.

¹²² Ardener, 7.

there was apparently so little European activity on the Cross River during this initial period of maritime trade in West Africa:

. . . although the Portuguese may have known of the Cross River, it is unlikely that they traded there before the middle of the seventeenth century. For Pieter De Marees, writing about 1600, advised traders to ignore all the rivers of what is now called the Bight of Biafra, because there was nothing to be gained there, and there was a danger of being stranded. Moreover, Ardener has recently drawn attention to Leers's 1665 edition of *Leo Africanus*, in which an addition to the text states that a great reef prevented entry to the Old Calabar river.¹²³

However, I find this explanation unconvincing on several points. Not only does Latham employ Dutch sources to explain the motives of the Castilians and Portuguese, those Dutch sources were written much later than the period in question, and nearly 150 years later in the case of Leers. We also know the Portuguese would not have agreed with De Marees' claim that there was nothing to be gained from the rivers feeding the Bight of Biafra—as noted above, Pereira tells us they were trading for slaves, ivory, and pepper at Benin and along the Cameroon coast by ca. 1505 (in fact, the Portuguese were trading at Benin from the 1470s), and Pires in 1518 thought there was “much gold” in the Rio del Rey.

The historian A. E. Afigbo considered the early Portuguese and Castilian sources on Guinea and their significance in understanding the early contact period in the Cross River region. His comments remain bear repeating:

In the first place not all the records of visitors to West Africa between c. 1450 and 1686 [the date of Olfert Dapper's famous chronicle] have survived [the 1755 Lisbon earthquake being a major reason]. In the second place the records, especially those written by sailors from the Iberian peninsula, who did more than any other group in Europe to explore

¹²³ Latham, 17.

the coast of West Africa, were not designed to give a detailed picture of the coast and its peoples. . . .it has been pointed out that though the Portuguese had an extensive knowledge of the coast of Guinea, what has survived in their records is no accurate indication of how much they knew or of where they visited.¹²⁴

In this light, it is interesting that oral histories collected by Nicklin among the Oron people (who reside on the western side of the Cross River southwest of Calabar), recount that they moved their settlements inland during the early years of the maritime trade to avoid specifically Portuguese slave raiding parties.¹²⁵ Onyile Bassey Onyile, a Professor of Art at Georgia Southern University (and who is now completing his Ph.D. dissertation on the Oron carved memorial figures, *ekpu*, as noted in the Chapter One), told to me a similar story he heard from his great-grandfather, Etim Asuquo Edet of Atabong village, who died in 1977 at age ninety-two. This version also describes not generically “white” (or Dutch, French, or English) slavers, but identifies them specifically as Portuguese, using the creolized term *Portugee*.¹²⁶ A similar word, *Potokee*, was recorded by Keith Nicklin and Jill Salmons among the Ika in western Ibibioland.¹²⁷

While there is no known written evidence describing the Portuguese slave raids mentioned in Oron oral histories, there is documentation from the eighteenth century

¹²⁴ A. E. Afigbo, “Efik Origin and Migrations Reconsidered,” *Nigeria Magazine* 87 (1965), 277.

¹²⁵ John Edem, *The Impact of Christianity on Oron Community 1897-1960* (Unpublished Bachelor’s thesis, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 1976), 2, citing interview with Chief A.M.E. Mba, July 4, 1975. See also Efiong Edunam, “Oron Pre-Colonial Economy,” in Uya, *A History of Oron People*, 83, citing Chief Mba from an interview of August 14, 1978.

¹²⁶ Personal communication with Onyile Bassey Onyile, 6 April 2004.

¹²⁷ Keith Nicklin and Jill Salmons, “Ikem: The History of a Masquerade in Southeast Nigeria,” in ed. Sidney Kasfir, *West African Masks and Cultural Systems* (Tervuren: Musée Royal de L’Afrique Centrale, 1988), 138. The authors describe *Potokee* in current usage as a generic reference for “new or unusual imports to the area.”

concerning the forced abduction of people near Old Calabar by English and Efik slave traders. About 1765, a time when the power of Old Calabar was still increasing, the slave trader Isaac Parker accompanied his Efik colleague Dick Ebro on slave raids on at least two occasions.¹²⁸ Parker described how his party, traveling by canoe, hid along the shoreline waiting for the cover of darkness before attacking villages nearby and taking as many people as possible (forty-five in their first attempt). One may presume that earlier efforts to acquire slaves, such as that of the *Peach-tree* crew of Watts et al. a century earlier, were no less opportunistic. Certainly the local people would have reacted to such raids, perhaps at first by resisting however possible and then later, conceivably, retreating into the hinterland to avoid further attacks.

The “Calabar” Ivory Horns

Despite the lack of merchant records, there is other physical evidence for a late-sixteenth-century European presence in the lower Cross River. This is significant, considering that conventional history dates the first European trade in this area to the latter part of the seventeenth century.

The evidence is represented by a group of carved ivory horns described by art historian Ezio Bassani in 1978 (at least nineteen are now known).¹²⁹ I mention these horns and their relationship to the cloudy issue of early European trade in the lower Cross River area because, like the Calabar terracottas, they offer additional early evidence of

¹²⁸ See Simmons in ed. Forde, *Efik Traders of Old Calabar*, 7 and Sparks, 53.

¹²⁹ See Ezio Bassani, *African Art and Artefacts in European Collections 1400-1800* (London: British Museum Press, 2000), appendix I, “Ivory horns from Calabar,” 263-267.

nsibidi, or at least a visual system similar to it.

The horns are readily identified by their decoration carved in low relief, including the main image of a reptile accompanied by parallel bands of zig-zagging lines and, in some cases, various discrete geometric symbols (Fig. 5.1). Based on stylistic evidence, Bassani argues they were created within a fairly short time and probably within the same workshop somewhere in the lower Cross River region where similar reptile imagery and motifs akin to *nsibidi* have been prominent aspects of visual culture.¹³⁰ However, the particular design seen on Fig. 5.1, a three-pronged arc, is not limited to the lower Cross River region considering the modern *nsibidi* repertoire (Figs. 6.7, 6.8, 6.10, 6.11). Bassani believes all such horns entered Europe between ca. 1551-1600, as suggested by the provenance of certain examples noted below.¹³¹

One of these horns, now in the British Museum, was formerly in the collection of Sir Hans Sloane who described it in the early eighteenth century, “A trumpet from Guinea, used by the inhabitants. . .”¹³² Sloane also noted that while in Europe the horn was fitted with brass mounts, converting it into an elaborate drinking cup in the form of a fish. An inscription on the horn states, “Drinke you this and thinke no scorne all though the cup be much like a horne 1599 Fines [or Fine S]” (Fig. 5.2). It is the only such horn inscribed with a date and therefore provides a foundation for dating the others, which

¹³⁰ Bassani, *African Art and Artefacts in European Collections 1400-1800*, 263-267.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 266.

¹³² See W. A. Hart, “A Rediscovered Afro-Portuguese Horn in the British Museum,” *African Arts* 26, 4 (1993), 70-71; J. C. H. King, “Ethnographic Collections: Collecting in the Context of Sloane’s ‘Miscellanies’,” in A. MacGregor (ed.), *Sir Hans Sloane, Collector, Scientist, Antiquary: Founding Father of the British Museum* (London, 1994); Bassani, *African Art and Artefacts in European Collections 1400-1800*, 42, 263-267.

display very similar styles and iconography.

Bassani offers archival evidence concerning another horn that corroborates the early dating of the ex-Sloane piece. This one entered the Museum für Ethnographie, Munich (then the Museum für Völkerkunde), in 1926 from the Bayerische Nationalmuseum, having previously been Bavarian royal property. Thus, Bassani reasons, it is most probably the same so-called “Indian” ivory trumpet with the image of a crocodile mentioned in Johann Fickler’s 1598 inventory of the Bavarian Kunstkammer, largely the creation of Duke Albrecht V who reigned from 1563-1579. Bassani explains that the adjective “Indianisher” can often be understood as a general term meaning “non-European” or “native” in early descriptions of European curiosity collections; many such objects have since proved to be African.¹³³

The horn now in the Castle Kunstkammer, Ambras, appears in the 1659 inventory of Archduke Leopold Wilhem’s Kunstkammer as, “A large ivory hunting horn with a crocodile.”¹³⁴ Another example, now lost, appears in an illustration done before 1666 by Domenico Tencalla of objects from Manfredo Settala’s *Museum Septalianum* in Milan.¹³⁵ Two other horns arrived in Copenhagen no later than 1710, though Bassani comments that most of this collection was made in the second half of the seventeenth century.¹³⁶

¹³³ Bassani, *African Art and Artefacts in European Collections 1400-1800*, 112.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 172.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 152.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 266.

Thus, it appears that at least four of these particular six horns had already entered widely dispersed European collections well before any known mention of trade on the Cross River appeared in written sources.

Jill Salmons and Keith Nicklin conducted extensive fieldwork in the Cross River region beginning in the 1970s, and they agreed that on iconographic and stylistic grounds, the “Calabar” horns likely originated in the lower Cross area, but probably not at Calabar. Salmons attributed the horns to the other side of the river, to the area of the southern Ibibio generally, while Nicklin later narrowed the focus by suggesting Eket or Oron in particular.¹³⁷ (Ekpo Eyo, furthermore, agrees that the horns would not have originated among the Efiks of Old Calabar because their iconography includes depictions of frogs, which are not particularly significant in the Efik Leopard Society, or even Efik culture in general.¹³⁸)

Regarding the possible function of ivory horns, in 1699 James Barbot noted the use of “horns” and “trumpets” in the New Calabar River area of the Niger Delta and these are clearly associated with leadership and power.¹³⁹ More recently, Jill Salmons wrote of the martial connotations of Ibibio ivory horns formerly used to muster and signal troops,

¹³⁷ Jill Salmons, “Martial Arts of the Annang,” *African Arts* 19,1 (1985), 59; Keith Nicklin, *Ekpu: The Oron Ancestor Figures of South Eastern Nigeria* (London and Coimbra: The Horniman Museum and Gardens and Museu Antropológico da Universidade de Coimbra, 1999), 65.

¹³⁸ Ekpo Eyo, personal communication 16 August 2004.

¹³⁹ “Before the king goes aboard a ship newly come in, he repairs to his idol house, with drums beating and trumpets sounding. . . . Every time their small fleet of canoos [sic] goes up for slaves, and when they return, they blow their horns or trumpets for joy . . .” James Barbot, “The Abstract of a Voyage to New Calabar River, or Rio Real, in the year 1699,” in *A description of the coasts of north and south Guinea and of Ethiopia inferior vulgarly Angola* (London, 1746), 455-465, quoted in G. I. Jones, *The Trading States of the Oil Rivers*, 41.

which now are chiefly regalia.¹⁴⁰ Thus, the pronged-arc motif on the horn just mentioned appears to represent the forceful power of leadership.

The idea that such horns were collected along the western side of the river, rather than Calabar to the east, is supported by textual evidence. Early sources clearly indicate that Calabar was not the only location in the Cross River region where early commerce between Europeans and Africans took place. For example, according to Jean Barbot (1698), Europeans were buying supplies from two individuals in particular, “William King Agbisherea” and “Robin King Agbisherea.” As Jeffreys demonstrated, these men were Ibibio chiefs (and therefore would have lived on the opposite side of the Cross River from Calabar) in light of the fact that the Ibibio region was known by various iterations of “Egbosherry” until the late nineteenth century.¹⁴¹ Barbot, it should be remembered, also noted that the Cross River “is well furnish’d with villages and hamlets all about, where Europeans drive their trade with the Blacks.”¹⁴² This observation indicates that Old Calabar had yet to achieve its monopoly over European trade on the Cross River. Thus, as their style suggests, it is probable that the horns were obtained from somewhere along the western bank of the Cross River, and prior to the Efik monopoly established in the eighteenth century.

Examples of the so-called “Afro-European” ivories collected from the major trading sites along the Guinea coast from Sierra Leone to Angola often display European-

¹⁴⁰ Jill Salmons, “Martial Arts of the Annang,” 57-63.

¹⁴¹ M. D. W. Jeffreys, *Old Calabar and Notes on the Ibibio Language* (Calabar: Hope Waddell Training Institute Press, 1935), 13-16. See also Simmons in ed. Forde, 39, 74, n. 66; Waddell, *Twenty-Nine Years*, map facing 242.

¹⁴² Eds. Hair, Jones, Law, *Barbot on Guinea*, 677; Ardener, 22-23.

inspired forms and designs, such as saltcellars and hunting horns decorated with royal coats-of-arms, hunting scenes, ships, soldiers, etc. Moreover, the hunting horns the Europeans commissioned are end-blown, which is the European convention, while African horns made for local use are typically side-blown (as are the “Calabar” horns). Yet, the “Calabar” horns display none of the European-inspired iconography. Bassani therefore reasonably concluded that the “Calabar” horns were likely not commissioned by Europeans, but were instead made for local use, which is suggested by the wear evident on the objects themselves.¹⁴³

If the Oron oral traditions do in fact reference the Portuguese, their activity most likely would have occurred earlier than the 1640s when they were finally reduced to minor status in West Africa.¹⁴⁴ In any case, considering the evidence of the horns (e.g. if the 1599 date on the ex-Sloane ivory horn is in fact indicative of its presence in Europe at that time), it seems there is cause to revise our dating of the arrival of Europeans who traded in the Cross River. The conventional period of the 1660s or thereabouts,¹⁴⁵ appears to be at least sixty years too late. More importantly, we may ask ourselves what these Europeans were doing there and what were the ramifications of their actions on local peoples. It is wholly feasible that anybody occupying the coastal areas of the major

¹⁴³ Bassani, *African Art and Artefacts in European Collections 1400-1800*, 267.

¹⁴⁴ According to P. E. H. Hair, “Portuguese contacts with the coast of West Africa began in the 1440s and intensified until 1500, after which the rival claims of Asia and then Brazil gradually limited and ultimately dissipated the Portuguese effort. Nevertheless, Portugal, the only effective European power in Guinea for a whole century, that is, up to the 1550s, remained the major European power on the coast at least up to the 1610s....and not until the 1640s were the Portuguese finally overwhelmed and reduced to minor status.” See Hair, “Discovery and Discoveries: The Portuguese in Guinea 1444-1650,” *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 69 (1992), 11.

¹⁴⁵ See Ardener, 26; Latham, 17.

waterways would have reacted to slave raids in much the same manner as the people of Oron claim to have done, i.e., they may have fled inland if they perceived a great enough threat.

In this light, I must at least wonder why a pottery factory such as the one discovered at Obot Okoho (described in Chapter Four) would have been abandoned with so many objects still in place. That it lies in proximity to the Great Qua River, a major lower tributary of the Cross, might be significant in this respect. However, the dating of this site as currently understood falls short of this initial period of European contact—the later date for one of the two radiocarbon samples from nearby Okang Mbang is 1440, while privately-obtained TL-dates for stylistically comparable (but illicit and unscientifically recovered) objects yielded *terminus ante quem* dates of 1420, 1435, 1475, and 1565. Yet considering the preliminary state of the chronology for secure objects (just two radiocarbon dates), and the lack of investigated early historic sites in the area, it would be premature to attribute the apparent abandonment of the Obot Okoho pottery to any European activity, directly or indirectly. It is, however, an issue that merits further investigation.

Early European Written Sources for Old Calabar

The earliest known English-language report about the Old Calabar region, dating from 1672, is a remarkable story about one John Watts, a crewman of the London slave vessel *Peach-tree*.¹⁴⁶ After having procured the ship's requisite cargo, we are told, the

¹⁴⁶ Richard Watts, *A True Relation of the inhumane and unparallel'd Actions, and barbarous Murders of Negroes or Moors, committed on three Englishmen in Old Calabar in Guinny, &c.* London: Thomas

eighteen-year-old sailor was sent ashore with three mates under orders to sell their leftover stock of copper bars, a local currency. During their approach to shore, Watts claimed, the party was attacked by natives and taken hostage. Within the following month, not only were his three companions killed, we are told they were broiled and eaten by their captors. Watts managed to spare himself and survive amongst the natives until he could find passage home. After a successful journey home to England months later, the young slave-trader recounted the incredible story of his escape—from what he called, without apparent irony, “so cruel a bondage.”

John Watts did not himself write the published account, but apparently narrated it to his uncle, Richard Watts, “publick Notary of Deal.” The eye-catching title, *A True Relation of the inhumane and unparallel’d Actions, and barbarous Murders of Negroes or Moors, committed on three Englishmen in Old Calabar in Guinny, &c.*, apparently garnered it some popularity, for it was reprinted in summarized form in 1686.¹⁴⁷ And though it headlines the purported killings, much of the story relates what is essentially an ethnography of the local people and their “heathen” ways, including passages about the rituals of birth, marriage, and death, slaves, provisions, houses, weapons, government, and religion—the details of which reveal some intimate knowledge of local customs. Thus, Watts’ story is especially important here, considering that most European accounts that followed, at least until the nineteenth century, limited themselves primarily to information relevant to navigation and trade.

Passenger and Benjamin Hurlock, 1672.

¹⁴⁷ On the reprint, see eds. Hair, Jones, and Law, v. II, n. 1, 701.

The level of detail provided in the account would indicate that Watts did in fact spend time in the lower Cross River area, in one of the various Efik (or even Ibibio) polities considered then to be a constituent part of Old Calabar. For example, a ruler he identifies as the “King of the Buckamores,” is called “E-fn-me,” which seems analogous to Efiom, one of the original Efik founding clans and which is still a common name used by Efiks.¹⁴⁸ Watts mentions the people speak a language called “Tata,” a term that Jean Barbot translated as “speak” in the “Old Calabar language” [i.e. Efik] about 1732.¹⁴⁹

Watts comments on a wide variety of subjects, some of which continued to be associated with the Calabar area into the modern era: jewelry made of copper bars; foodstuffs including “a root like a turnip” (yam?), fish, plantains, palm oil, and “mimbo,” (a common term for palm wine even today); transport by dugout canoe; governance by a ruler and concomitant social stratification of the wealthy and commoners; religious practices involving sacrifice before a “picture” of a diety; iron weapons (e.g. lances and swords with engraved decoration); and mortuary customs of the wealthy involving the interment of personal property with the deceased, including pottery (one grave mentioned included, “copper bars. . . a stool, an earthen Pot, a Calabash, a Goard [sic], &c”).¹⁵⁰ This last comment is especially interesting here, as it is the earliest written documentation of mortuary customs similar to what has been discovered through archaeological investigation as sites such as Abasi Edem and Old Marian Road. As a general subject of

¹⁴⁸ Watts, 6.

¹⁴⁹ See Barbot in eds. Hair, Jones, Law, 678 and n. 23.

¹⁵⁰ Watts, 12-15.

inquiry, the funeral rites of Old Calabar would increasingly draw the attention of European visitors.

Unfortunately, however, the historical record of the Calabar area following Watts, and through most of the eighteenth century, is rather sparse in terms of references to visual culture under consideration here. There are some interrelated reasons that could account for this. As mentioned previously, the early Europeans who visited Calabar did so for strictly commercial reasons and therefore were not as interested in material cultural as would be the missionaries and colonial officials of the nineteenth century, who were differently motivated and much more interested in cultural issues. As well, the early trade often took place on board the European ships themselves, rather than on land. Though even when European traders did venture on shore, they stayed amongst the Efik elite and did not explore the surrounding lands because they were not permitted to do so. Indeed, there is evidence that the Efik traders, in order to protect their control of the Cross River economy, actively prohibited Europeans from dealing with anyone other than themselves. For example, even as late as 1877, James Broom Walker remarked in a paper read to the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland that, “The country behind [Old Calabar] . . . has not yet been explored to any extent . . . on account of the reluctance of the Calabar tribe [i.e. Efiks] to permit Europeans to enter the country, so that its wealth remains unknown.”¹⁵¹ Doubtless the fear of malaria also kept many from going ashore.

¹⁵¹Walker, 124.

Therefore it is not at all surprising that written sources of this period overwhelmingly concern trade. They describe a great variety of European goods that were sent to Africa. Using information gathered between 1678-1706, Jean Barbot noted what particular items would be most welcome at Old Calabar to trade for slaves and ivory. They included iron and copper bars, colorful cloths and glass beads, bells, pewter basins and tankards, and copper bracelets.¹⁵² As the trade grew and deeper relationships formed between the Europeans and Efiks, the type and value of goods sent to Old Calabar grew accordingly. Furniture, paintings, mirrors, even entire pre-fabricated iron buildings, were traded for enslaved Africans and ivory, as well as palm oil, pepper, salt, and other foodstuffs necessary for the journey to the Americas. After the transatlantic slave trade was banned in the early nineteenth century, palm oil became the primary export of Old Calabar; among other uses, it was a key ingredient of European factory-produced soaps (e.g. Pears).¹⁵³

Leopard Society Visual Culture

An important eighteenth-century source is the extraordinary diary written in creole English by the Efik slave trader and prominent Leopard (Ekpe) Society member Antera Duke (the anglicized name of the Ntiero Edem Efiong of Duke Town). It primarily details the writer's commercial activities between 1785 and 1788, when Old

¹⁵² Barbot in eds. Hair, Jones, Law, 677-678, 704, n. 19.

¹⁵³ *The Story of Old Calabar: A Guide to the National Museum at the Old Residency, Calabar* (Lagos: The National Commission for Museums and Monuments, 1986), 67.

Calabar was exporting its greatest numbers of enslaved peoples (about 17,500 individuals per year).¹⁵⁴

Duke's entries concerning the involvement of the Ekpe Society in commercial matters leave no doubt that it was a powerful political, social, and economic force at Old Calabar by the late eighteenth century. Ekpe was also an important patron of the arts and Duke's comments for November 11, 1786 include mention of an Ekpe meeting house, a structure that would have been visually quite distinctive, as well as a tantalizing reference to what is today a key symbol of Ekpe membership. Duke wrote, "we went into the town palaver house and we dressed [to go to] the town again in long cloth and Ekpe cloth."¹⁵⁵ Thus, the "town palaver house" was the Ekpe Society meeting house, while the "Ekpe cloth" is considered to be the well-known emblem of Leopard Society membership, called *ukara*.¹⁵⁶ Modern examples (Figs. 6.15-6.16) are covered with a great variety of *nsibidi* signs and are used to identify Leopard Society members throughout the Cross River region.

Thomas Hutchinson, the British Consul for the Bight of Biafra, gave a vivid description of wall decoration he observed at the residence of a typical Efik trader, who because of his occupation, undoubtedly would have been a Leopard Society member, too (one of the group's primary functions was the enforcement of debt payments, which guaranteed credit in business transactions). Hutchinson remarked that, "A sketch of one

¹⁵⁴ Lovejoy and Richardson, 92.

¹⁵⁵ Duke in ed. Forde, 51.

¹⁵⁶ Simmons in ed. Forde, 76, n. 82. However, I should note the possibility that Duke's "Ekpe cloth" is something different than today's *ukara*, which is a sewn-resist, indigo-dyed cloth commissioned from certain Igbo groups.

of the trading gentleman's houses will suffice for the whole," so one might assume that this particular example was not at all unique in Calabar.¹⁵⁷ Stepping into the interior of Antika Cobham's house, Hutchinson was overwhelmed with what he saw:

The walls all round the court are adorned with a variety of extravagant designs of apocryphal animals; impossible crocodiles, possessing a flexibility in their outlines as is never seen in the living specimens; leopards with six feet; birds with horns from their tails. Diamond, and crescent, and cruciform shapes of vari-coloured hues abound wherever there is a spot to paint them on . . . Looking to the large room, the first idea of wonder that came into my mind was, how the person who fitted it up managed to get out of it, or if he did get out without breaking anything. There did not seem to me to be space for a fly to turn or stand within its precincts. China and glass jugs, all kinds of delf [delftware] and crockeryware, mirrors in profusion and of every size, blue decanters, chandeliers and pictures, glass globes and China vases, with an uncountable quantity of indescribable jimcrackry, seem heaped up to repletion.¹⁵⁸

The composition of the wall decorations that Hutchinson describes, combining "apocryphal animals" with geometric designs, again brings to mind the kind of composite *nsibidi* imagery seen on *ukara* cloths, in which diamonds, crescents, cruciforms and other geometric motifs are interspersed with images of maskers and animal forms, particularly crocodiles, lizards, serpents, turtles, leopards, and birds (Figs. 6.15-6.16). P. A. Talbot in 1912 published a photograph showing a similarly decorated interior of a Leopard Society house.¹⁵⁹

Residential Decoration

R. K. Oldfield, in an article published in the *Journal of the Royal Geographical*

¹⁵⁷ Hutchinson, 124.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 124-25.

¹⁵⁹ Talbot, *In the Shadow of the Bush*, pl. facing 248.

Society of 1837, remarks that “the houses at Ecricok [the present Ikot Offiong, an Efik settlement] and Calabar are about the same style; the inside walls are also painted in the same manner, with red, blue, and yellow circles.”¹⁶⁰

In describing houses “belonging to the middle and upper classes,” William Daniell, an assistant-surgeon with the British army medical service in West Africa, notes favorably the decoration of the central courtyards that are typical of Efik traditional architecture: “The inner surface of the walls is adorned with curious and elaborate arabesque designs, in which red, yellow, black, and white pigments are blended, with all the artistic skill of native professors.”¹⁶¹

Body Decoration

Less than twenty years after Antera Duke created his diary, Henry Nicholls, writing in 1805 to the Association for Promoting the Discovery of the Interior Parts of Africa in London, created a remarkable sketch of Calabar.¹⁶² He included the following account concerning body decoration:

The Calabar natives are very well formed, and by no means unpleasant countenances; they shave their heads in different forms, some in angles, some in circles; their temples are raised considerably by repeated cuppings; some tattoo their arms from the shoulder to the wrist, by making little incisions about a quarter of an inch from each other; some their

¹⁶⁰ R. K. Oldfield, “A Brief Account of an Ascent of the Old Calabar River in 1836,” *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society* 7 (1837), 198.

¹⁶¹ William Daniell, “On the Natives of Old Calabar, West Coast of Africa,” *The Edinburgh New Philosophical Journal* XL (1846), 313-327; reprint, *On the Natives of Old Calabar, West Coast of Africa [1846]*, ed. Donald Simmons (Calabar: American Association for African Research, 1964), 8, 13.

¹⁶² See “Nicholls,” in ed. Robin Hallett, *Records of the African Association 1788-1831* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1964), 191-210, which reprints Nicholls’ second and final letter to the Association, which was originally published in the Association’s *Proceedings*, vol. 2 (1810), 406-414.

breasts, and a vast many of them are not marked at all; the women are marked the same way as the men, and shave their heads in the same way; sometimes they dress their heads with an immense tuft at top, as thick as your wrist, bound round with red.¹⁶³

Daniell also noticed body decoration at Old Calabar:

The hair of the chiefs is kept closely cropped, and then shaved into a series of beautiful arabesque patterns, which evince great ingenuity and taste. Portions of the body, and in women, particularly the face, are delicately tattooed [sic] in circular figures.¹⁶⁴

The Reverend William Anderson observed that some local women decorated their cheeks and bodies with “curious figures.”¹⁶⁵ And Consul Hutchinson mentioned a woman said to be the senior wife of “King Aqua, monarch of Aqua [i.e. Qua] territory . . . the front of her body [was] tattooed with deep black marks, in the forms of birds, circles, angles, and parallel lines.”¹⁶⁶

Certainly decoration in the form of angles, parallel lines, circular figures, and the “diamond, and crescent, and cruciform shapes,” noted by Hutchinson, as well as the “hieroglyphs” he said women carved onto calabashes (e.g. Figs. 6.7-6.8),¹⁶⁷ and perhaps even the Rev. Anderson’s “curious figures,” are also found on the Calabar terracottas.

¹⁶³ Nicholls, 209.

¹⁶⁴ Daniell in ed. Simmons, 8.

¹⁶⁵ Letter by L. Anderson, ca. 1849, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh, William Anderson letters, MS 2981, 26.

¹⁶⁶ Hutchinson, 169.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 160.

Ceramics at Old Calabar

Imports

From the late eighteenth century, Old Calabar was evidently a very good market for European ceramics. Captain John Adams noted in his book, *Sketches Taken During Ten Voyages to Africa, Between the Years 1786 and 1800*, that at Old Calabar, European earthenware of “Assorted [types], in mugs, jugs, basins, plates, &c.; mugs with covers always sell well.”¹⁶⁸ Though Adams also included the general category of “earthenware” among the items suitable for trade at other West African ports, such as Benin, Bonny, and Loango among others, only for Calabar did he enumerate specific types of ceramic objects within that category. Furthermore, on his lists of recommended trade goods for such places as Wydah, Ardrah, Badagry, and Lagos, the category of “earthenware” is not to be found at all. So it is clear that Adams, having studied his markets well, tailored the goods he offered according to local demand. Why then was Old Calabar such a good market for European ceramics?

One wonders if the strong demand for imported ceramics at Old Calabar had anything to do with a shortage of suitable local wares, whether resulting from an existing low level of production or a decline in production due to the fashionable new imports. Alternatively, the demand for imports may have been partially independent of the demand for local ceramics, especially if they were priced beyond the means of most

¹⁶⁸ John Adams, *Sketches Taken During Ten Voyages to Africa, Between the Years 1786 and 1800* (London, 1822; reprint New York and London: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1970), 113. Adams notes that various types of cloth (including examples from India as well as Asante in Guinea), guns (and powder and flints), beads, iron and lead bars, salt, copper rods (currency), liquor, and hardware (“Assorted, in scissors, knives, razors, locks, and needles, &c. &c.”) constituted the “Merchandise suitable for Old Calabar.”

people. It should also be noted that European kiln-fired and glazed ceramics (e.g. porcelain and stoneware) were not suitable replacements for all kinds of local ceramics, which were unglazed earthenwares (terracotta) fired at low temperature in flaming piles of brush, not enclosed kilns which allowed higher temperatures and the resultant creation of vitrified stoneware and porcelain. For example, European glazed ceramics could not handle the thermal shock of cooking nor were they able to cool stored water, which the relatively porous local pots achieved through slow evaporation. Thus, the demand for imported ceramics may have been driven by a combination of factors involving both status and function—they were exotic and perhaps expensive as well as being more durable (or desirable) than local wares in *some* circumstances. As will be shown, the popularity of imported ceramics remained high and they were often incorporated into traditional ritual contexts. A look into the history of Calabar-area ceramic production and use in the nineteenth century may shed some light on this question.

Ceramic Production in the Calabar Area

Between the mid-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, there were at least four pottery production centers in the vicinity of Calabar. Two of them, located at Ikorofiong [i.e. Ikot Offiong] and Ikoneto, are not well known. Ikorofiong lies on the west bank of the Cross River about twenty-five kilometers from Calabar in what is now Akwa Ibom State. Its pottery was mentioned in an 1859 Presbyterian missionary report.¹⁶⁹ In 2002 and 2004, I attempted to visit Ikot Offiong but due to an ongoing local war that has left

¹⁶⁹ Latham, 7, citing *United Presbyterian Church Missionary Record* 14 (August 1859).

the town abandoned, I was told it was not safe to visit.

Ikoneto is unusual, because according to Waddell, the pottery there was made by women who had been banished from their homes after giving birth to twins.¹⁷⁰ “These women employed themselves in making pots,” wrote Waddell, “for which a good clay was procured at no great distance, but their prices were hardly remunerative.”¹⁷¹

Considering that the ritual infanticide of twins was not unusual around Old Calabar at this time, and that the bodies of these twins were interred in pots left in the forest where no honorable person would be buried,¹⁷² it is deeply ironic that their disenfranchised mothers were left with no other alternative than to make pots for a living. I have found no other mention concerning this production center in the literature, so it is impossible to assess its contribution to local ceramic production. Thus, we do not know whether it was the temporary, ad-hoc arrangement of a few mothers of twins who happened to be potters, or a more longstanding practice that accommodated twin mothers specifically.

Two other centers of nineteenth-century pottery production, Ikot Ansa (Nkomnib clan) and Nkpara (Odukpani Local Government Area), are better known. The Qua town of Ikot Ansa, however, is infrequently mentioned in nineteenth-century records. Thus, even Latham cites no period sources when he mentions the town, but indicates significant nineteenth-century production at Ikot Ansa with his statement that pottery was made

¹⁷⁰ Waddell, 365.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² See, for example, W. P. Livingstone, *Mary Slessor of Calabar: Pioneer Missionary* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1915), pl. facing 160.

there “until the early years of the [twentieth] century.”¹⁷³ It remains common knowledge in Calabar that pottery was made at Ikot Ansa until the Nigerian Civil War.

The other production site was located at Nkpara, an Efut settlement on the Calabar River, now within Odukpani Local Government Area. It may have been a significant operation considering that it is the only pottery center—and besides some farms, the only economic enterprise—listed on Waddell’s 1863 map of the lower Cross River area.¹⁷⁴ He wrote:

[At Nkpara] the women, at least some of them, were employed in pottery work in the street The pots of various kinds, which the women had made, were well-shaped though not turned on the wheel. They were drying in the sun before being placed in the kiln, where, however, they seemed likely to receive a very insufficient firing. Baking and glazing are both greatly needed to render the native ware of much value. As now made they are frail.¹⁷⁵

Local Ceramics in Ritual Practice

The explorers Laird and Oldfield visited Old Calabar following their exploration of the Niger River between 1832-1834. One morning aboard their vessel they hosted the Efik leader and trader Duke Ephraim of Duke Town and noticed also that, “[Duke Ephraim’s] idol was brought on board,— a little abominable figure of clay: the bearer of

¹⁷³ Latham, 74.

¹⁷⁴ Waddell, 361; Latham, 75.

¹⁷⁵ Waddell, 361-362. Waddell’s reference to a “kiln” betrays a lack of knowledge of local ceramic production techniques. It is much more likely that the Nkpara potters fired their wares as is still done in throughout Nigeria today, amidst a pile of burning brush. Furthermore, if current practice is anything to go by, Waddell, being a man, may not have been permitted to see the areas where women potters fired their pots. In fact, by his own choice of words, he all but says so: “[the pots] *seemed likely to receive* a very insufficient firing” [emphasis added]. Thus, it seems that Waddell, having not actually witnessed the burning of pots at Nkpara, reverted instead to his own knowledge of European pottery production methods in which kiln-firing was the norm.

it followed him everywhere, and stood behind him during breakfast.”¹⁷⁶ Unfortunately, I have found no further reference to clay figurines used in such a manner among the Efik, although James Holman of the Royal Navy noted in 1828 that a “wooden image . . . is always carried about in the suite of the Duke.”¹⁷⁷ However, in 1884, Robert Stewart commented that a shrine at Uwet—which he called a “Creek Town outstation” (i.e. an Efik settlement)—contained “a number of idols made of clay; some representing human form, and some those of beasts.”¹⁷⁸ There is reason to believe that while the people of Uwet may have spoken Efik, they were not themselves Efiks.¹⁷⁹

Both Daniell (1846) and Walker (1877) remarked upon the family shrines generally found within Efik compounds that included ceramic vessels (cf. Fig. 6.3).¹⁸⁰

Foreign Competition

Throughout this period the Calabar potters, to some degree, would have faced competition from the various imported European ceramics and glassware. As previously mentioned, Adams noted that earthenwares of various types were in high demand in Calabar in the late eighteenth century. The trend evidently continued, for Hutchinson,

¹⁷⁶ MacGregor Laird and R. A. K. Oldfield, *Narrative of an Expedition into the Interior of Africa by the River Niger*, vol. I (London, 1837; reprint London: Frank Cass, 1971):277.

¹⁷⁷ James Holman, *Travels in Madeira, Sierra Leone, Teneriffe, St. Jago, Cape Coast, Fernando Po, Princes Island, Etc*, second edition (London: George Routledge, 1840), 406.

¹⁷⁸ Robert Stewart, *Old Calabar or Mission Work on the West Coast* (Parlane: Paisley, 1884), 64-65.

¹⁷⁹ A good example of the complexity of the ethnic/linguistic situation of the Cross River region, Uwet is elsewhere considered to be a Qua/Ejagham settlement, as well as another non-Ejagham group, see Latham, 88; J. C. Anene, “The Nigeria-Southern Cameroons Boundary,” *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 2, 1 (1961), 188.

¹⁸⁰ Daniell, 219; Walker, 122.

quoted above, reported the profusion of “China and glass jugs, all kinds of delf [and crockeryware . . . blue decanters . . . and China vases,”¹⁸¹ owned by Antika Cobham in 1847, while about the same time there were also “crates of earthenware” in the yard of King Eyamba of Duke Town, a prominent Efik trader.¹⁸² William Daniel reported that native Calabar markets at mid-century generally contained a variety of European earthenwares, which is an important indication that the imports were available to the general public and not hoarded amongst the Efik traders and their families.¹⁸³

How, then, were all of these European ceramics used at Old Calabar? Certainly they were found on the tables of the Efik elite, in part to impress their peers as well as, no doubt, the traders and missionaries who visited and with whom they did business. Imported ceramics also figured prominently in certain local rituals, especially those surrounding the deaths of important men.

Funerary Practices

European visitors to Old Calabar were fascinated by local funeral customs. One Mr. Grant, a former slave trader, wrote an account published in 1830 in the *Memoirs of the Late Captain Hugh Crow*, which includes a description of a type of memorial shrine:

. . . they here construct on the shore, at low-water mark, a small house or hut of bamboos thatched with palm leaves, say two feet long, and two and half in height. They then go to the house of the deceased, and take a number of articles, his property, such as cloth, old bones, pieces of iron,

¹⁸¹ Hutchinson, 124-125.

¹⁸² See Rev. William Dickie, *Story of the Mission in Old Calabar* (Edinburgh: Offices of United Presbyterian Church, 1894), 14.

¹⁸³ Daniell, 223.

jugs and other small articles; and, having cut the cloth in pieces, driven a hole into the bottom of the jug, and other wise broken or mutilated most of the articles . . . leave them as a monument or offering to the departed.¹⁸⁴

In 1846, the Rev. Waddell witnessed a similar construction, noting, “Outside the town [Old Town, Calabar] was a ‘devil house,’ a temporary structure, sacred to some deceased person, in which many articles of household use and value were damaged and left to perish.”¹⁸⁵ Consul Hutchinson, who witnessed the burials of two prominent Efiks, King Archibong and the “very respectable trader” known to Europeans as Iron Bar, offers a detailed account of elite Efik funeral practices in Old Calabar. Consequently, I find it necessary to quote him at length:

At Iron Bar’s, as I went into the yard, there was a dense crowd gathered round what was supposed to be his grave, which was made in the room where he died, and sunk to a depth of ten or twelve feet, that it might hold all of the things put into it for his use in the next world . . . brass pans, copper rods, mug, jugs, pots, ewers, tureens, plates, knives and forks, spoons, soap, looking-glasses, and a heap of Manchester cloth, all impaired in their integrity by a slight fracture or tear . . . There is always a hole left in the side of the grave, through which, from time to time rum or mimbo [palm wine] is poured for the spirit’s refreshment. With this there are also erected, within the house, or on the public road, or by the river’s side, what are called, “devil-houses,” of which Iron Bar’s were good specimens. There were three structures of this kind constructed for him; one in the court attached to the house, one outside, and one on the beach adjoining the river. All were similar in their fixings: a scarlet canopy overspread the bamboo roof placed to shelter the table, and over this again was a trio of parasols . . . around the table were three large sofas; and at either end of the roof a pendent glass lamp. But the greatest display was on the table. In the center was a large mirror, with a huge brass jug behind it. On either side, and covering every square inch of the table, heaped over each other as high up as an equilibrium could be sustained, were monster jugs, decanters, tumblers, soup tureens, flower

¹⁸⁴ See one Mr. Grant’s description of Old Calabar in Captain Hugh Crow, *Memoirs of the late Captain Hugh Crow* (London, 1830, 270-286; reprint, *Grant’s Sketch of Old Calabar*, ed. Donald Simmons, American Association for African Research Publication Number One, Calabar, 1958), 9-10.

¹⁸⁵ Waddell, 251.

vases, bottles, and mugs of all shapes and sizes, china and glass articles, as much as would stock a large shop, all being damaged like the articles placed in the graves The houses erected for King Archibong . . . were superior in their furniture to those of Iron Bar. That on the beach particularly contained a quantity of the productions of native art. The women always go in mourning by painting patterns of deep black on their foreheads, and the men by covering their bodies over with ashes.¹⁸⁶

In their wealth of details, the accounts of Grant, Waddell, and Hutchinson offer a number of important points to keep in mind: First, such elite funerals were public spectacles. Second, they served in part to highlight the importance of the deceased, whose status was bolstered by the display, at multiple sites, of the many native and imported objects he had acquired during his life. Third, these objects included a very large amount of ceramics and vessels of various kinds, many of which were imported. Fourth, these personal objects were routinely broken before deposition into the grave or memorial shrine. Fifth, the opening left for the pouring of libations indicates that such gravesites were meant to remain active ritual sites after the formal burial, and the shrines, being above ground, remained visible reminders of the deceased and also may have been revisited after their initial construction. And finally, certain modes of body decoration were associated with the mourning period.

Returning to the second and third points, it seems the particular kinds of funeral objects selected for the memorials commented not only on the general status, but also the specific office of the deceased. For example, it is not exactly surprising that “The [memorial] houses erected for King Archibong . . . were superior in their furniture to those of Iron Bar,” who was, after all, not a king. But why was it that King Archibong’s

¹⁸⁶ Hutchinson, 148-150.

shrine on the beach “particularly contained a quantity of the productions of native art,” rather than the more expensive—and therefore perhaps more obviously prestigious—imported goods that overflowed Iron Bar’s shrines? The preference for local products over imports in this context may serve a similar function as that performed by the otherwise moribund but native barkcloth that continues to appear in the installation ceremonies of the Qua paramount ruler in Calabar, the *Ntoe*, whose elaborate regalia is otherwise heavily influenced by English prototypes.¹⁸⁷ The archaic and relatively humble barkcloth included among the royal finery is nevertheless considered necessary for the successful enstoolment of the *Ntoe* because, according to Ndidem Edim Edim Imona during his own installation as *Ntoe*, it referenced an ancient Qua custom.¹⁸⁸ In other words, the wearing of barkcloth by a Qua ruler speaks to tradition and memory and a desired connection with the ancestors. It was, therefore, proper, and perhaps even prescribed, that a shrine dedicated to an Efik ruler contained examples of objects that were made locally and thus held traditional value.

Furthermore, the ancient terracottas of the Calabar area similarly reveal many instances of ritual breaking or piercing. Some of the ceramics were pierced even before firing,¹⁸⁹ while others were actually built with a hole through the base (Fig. 3.9), presumably to allow any libations poured in to pass unhindered into the earth.

¹⁸⁷ Keith Nicklin, *Guide to the National Museum Oron* (Lagos: Federal Department of Antiquities, 1977), 56.

¹⁸⁸ Keith Nicklin and Jill Salmons, “Bokyi Barkcloth: An Ethnographic Retrieval Study in S.E. Nigeria,” *Baessler-Archiv*, Neue Folge, Band XXVII (1979), 383.

¹⁸⁹ For example, see Ekpo, “Qua Terracottas Sculptures,” fig. 4; further (unpublished) examples may be seen at the Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

We are left with the idea that Calabar, some time after European contact was established, became a vibrant, sometimes violent, center of international trade. The local customs noted by visiting European traders often concerned practices they could relate to even though, or perhaps because, they considered the African version very strange (e.g. foodways, modes of dress and personal adornment, the decoration of buildings, the contents of private homes, political organization, burial practices and, on occasion, craft production). From these sources, furthermore, we can note that some Calabar area customs, such as the manner in which leaders were buried, have deep historical roots. And as indicated in the earliest published case from 1672, ceramic vessels were among the grave goods meant to honor the dead, a practice evident several hundred years earlier at the Abasi Edem site. What is also noteworthy in the context of the present study is that these same sources, in their references to such great collections of imported ceramics in the Efik traders' homes, burial assemblages, and memorial shrines, demonstrate the same cultural innovation, or willingness to adopt new forms and ideas, that characterizes the region today—and which makes investigating the origins of particular artistic practices very difficult. This same openness, however, also seems to foreshadow the fate of ritual ceramic production at Calabar and much of the wider Cross River region during the coming years.

CHAPTER SIX

CROSS RIVER VISUAL CULTURE DURING COLONIALISM AND THE MODERN ERA, 1885 TO THE PRESENT

*It is the Ekoi also who outline, with such dexterity and sureness of drawing, the designs in the coiffures and on the faces. Both in these and in the mural paintings the motives are mainly phytomorphic, whereas with most other peoples they are nearly always zoomorphic, skeuomorphic or geometrical—the first is especially noticeable in wood- and brass-work, the second in brass and pottery and the third in pottery and the staining of bodies and cicatrisation. The most common geometrical forms met with are circular dots, concentric circles, hatching, chevrons, herringbone, stars, lozenges, spirals and guilloche.*¹⁹⁰

P. A. Talbot, 1926

In this chapter, I continue to draw upon various written sources and objects, though now from the period following 1885 into the present day. By this, I seek to demonstrate the historical prevalence of designs similar to those found on the archaeological terracottas and to make comparisons between their contexts of use and analogous practices indicated in the archaeological record. It will be shown that certain practices, such as the interment of leaders, continued to be handled in much the same way as reported by Watts and others in the preceding chapter, which is essentially similar to what Ekpo Eyo discovered at the Abasi Edem site dating to the eighth-tenth century. Moreover, in the present period we now have much more informative descriptions of pottery and its uses, and the designs (such as *nsibidi*), that figure in various contexts and which appear on a variety of objects as well as the human body. Interestingly, Talbot's

¹⁹⁰ Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria*, 936.

words just quoted draw an explicit relationship between the decoration of ceramics and the decoration of the human body, which recalls the ancient terracotta anthropomorphic figurines already discussed. The conceptual linking of pots to the human body, manifest in the creation of anthropomorphic figurines, is widespread throughout Africa.¹⁹¹ It is also noteworthy that Talbot's catalogue of design motifs could also describe the ancient Calabar terracottas and in this regard, is but one of many clues revealing the historical depth of this iconography in the Cross River region. *Nsibidi*, however, should not be conflated with this iconography but rather is a prominent component of it.

Due primarily to European colonialism and missionary enterprise, the years following 1885 witnessed a tremendous increase in written documents about the peoples of the Cross River region. Unlike the early European traders in the area who often carried out their business aboard ship rather than on land, colonial officials, travelers, and missionaries had ample opportunity to deal directly with Africans. This more personal manner of working amongst the local people, along with concurrent developments in the burgeoning fields of anthropology and travel writing, provided these visitors great impetus to observe, record, and publish their experiences "opening up" what were to them new territories. Much of this information concerns visual culture, and as we have seen, the prevailing ethnocentrism of the day did color much of what was put into print. Fortunately, there were some commentators during the colonial period more willing to

¹⁹¹ For additional examples from eastern Nigeria/western Cameroon, see, among others, Marla Berns, "Ga'anda Scarification: A Model for Art and Identity," in A. Rubin (ed.), *Marks of Civilization: Artistic Transformations of the Human Body* (Los Angeles, 1988); "Ceramic Clues: Art History in the Gongola Valley," *African Arts* 22,2 (1989), 52; "Pots as People: Yungur Ancestral Portraits," *African Arts* 23, 3 (1990):54; Paul Gebauer, *Art of Cameroon* (Portland and New York: Portland Art Museum and The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1978), 219, pls. 71-80; Marcilene Wittmer and William Arnett, *Three Rivers of Nigeria* (Atlanta: The High Museum of Art, 1978), 105-110.

recognize the artistic talents of the Cross River peoples they met. Whereas in previous historical periods we have but mere glimpses into the visual culture of the Cross River region, in this period we are able to appreciate just how widespread the iconography of *nsibidi* (and similar motifs) could be.

I begin the chapter by returning briefly to the issue of British colonialism in the Cross River region, because at this juncture it is important to be aware of the socio-political climate in which art production took place. So much then was rapidly and fundamentally changing, particularly in terms of power structures, both political and spiritual, and the region's visual culture is inextricably bound to these issues.

A fundamental aspect of the colonizing mission in southeastern Nigeria was its religious component. The Nigerian historian A. E. Ayandele described the British colonial government's cooperation with missionary efforts during the Aro Expedition of 1902 (mentioned in Chapter One), which was perhaps the most significant moment of colonization in the Cross River region:

In 1901-02 the decision arrived at by both Sir Ralph Moor [then High Commissioner of the Niger Coast Protectorate]. . .and the Presbyterian missionaries as early as 1898, that the Aros would be "dealt with", and Christianity imposed on the Ibos, was put into effect by the Aro Expedition. Three columns of troops converged on Aro Chukwu and blew up the *Long Juju*, the citadel of Ibo religion and an integrative institution of Eastern Nigeria. In this operation, the steamers of the Presbyterian Mission took an active part, while Dr Rattray, one of its medical missionaries, was chaplain and medical officer to the troops. Immediately after the expedition a Dr T. B. Adams, an official attached to the army, began preaching, followed a few weeks later by James Johnson and at the end of the year by the intrepid "white queen of Okoyong", Mary Slessor.¹⁹²

¹⁹² Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria 1842-1914*, 114-115.

Apart from the human suffering caused by such military expeditions, a great deal of material culture was lost during these actions as well. C. N. de Cardi noted in 1899 that in the hinterlands of Old Calabar, “even the Ju-Ju priests begin to feel that the power of the Consul-General is much greater than that of their grinning idols and trickery.”¹⁹³ As it happened, missionaries and their converts destroyed many such “idols.” For example, nearly all of the approximately two dozen Kalabari ancestral screens (*duein fubara*) from the Niger Delta now in Western museums were given to P. A. Talbot between 1914-1916 by local chiefs who, at no little personal risk, wanted them spared from the iconoclasm of the Christian fundamentalist Garrick Braide and his followers.¹⁹⁴ We shall see how missionary efforts affected other local artistic practices, particularly certain aspects of ceramic production. Not surprisingly, with the increasing acceptance of Christianity in the Cross River region came a concomitant decrease in the production of objects meant for traditional ceremonies.

With these issues in mind, let us now survey the written sources of this period for information on Cross River arts and visual culture that might shed light on the archaeological terracottas from Calabar. I begin by describing local ceramic traditions, starting with Calabar, then moving up the Cross River and the adjacent inland regions. I will note the roles of ceramics in various contexts, both mundane and sacred. However, it should be known that one cannot always know the significance of a pot based solely on

¹⁹³C. N. de Cardi, “A Short Description of the Natives of the Niger Coast Protectorate,” in Mary Kingsley, *West African Studies* (London: Macmillan, 1899):557. De Cardi also keeps alive the cannibalism trope by way of some truly awful verbal imagery, but the human flesh he reportedly saw was more probably from one or more species of monkey, a local favorite (566).

¹⁹⁴ See Nigel Barley, *Foreheads of the Dead* (Washington D.C. and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988), 7-8.

its form, because the same type of pot could serve in various functions depending upon its context. Thus, while the written sources do not always describe the specific appearances of the ceramics they mention, a bowl made for everyday use would gain new meaning if left at a shrine as an offering. Yet, it is also clear that some ceramics were made specifically for ceremonial use, and these could be quite different in appearance from everyday wares. They often displayed more elaborate decoration and more complicated forms or, in the case of anthropomorphic ceramics, different forms altogether.

After describing ceramics I will then broaden the scope to include other objects in different media that are nonetheless comparable to the ancient terracottas in terms of their decoration, especially when displaying *nsibidi* and like motifs. This is a broad category of things (and practices), including wooden objects, textiles, calabashes, architectural decoration, masquerades, and body ornament. By this, I hope to demonstrate the widespread prevalence of designs such as those found on the terracottas in the visual culture of the Cross River region throughout the last one hundred and twenty years.

Ceramics

Colonial-era sources frequently mention the usage of pottery throughout the Cross River region, in everyday domestic use as well as sacred contexts. For example,

P. A. Talbot noted:

Pottery is practiced throughout the Southern Provinces [of Nigeria] in spots where suitable clay is to be found—and these exist among practically every tribe As a rule the manufacture is in the hands of the women; in some places they nearly all make it, in others the art is confined

to a few families The decoration consist usually of geometrical designs or figures of animals or men applied in relief.¹⁹⁵

From this and many other sources, it is apparent that pottery-making was a very common practice in the Cross River region in the early colonial period, with many local centers of production to be found. Throughout the region, pottery was, and is still today, hand-built, most often using variations of the coiling technique.¹⁹⁶ Pots of various shapes and sizes were employed daily by every family for storing, preparing, cooking, and serving various foods and drinks; while in sacred contexts, pots and ceramic figurines contained or conducted offerings that honored and commemorated various gods and spirits, including ancestors and the recently deceased.

Modern Cross River Ceramic Traditions

In the Calabar area during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the two pottery production sites mentioned in the previous chapter, Ikot Ansa (Qua) and Nkpara (Efut), still operated. According to Latham, production at Ikot Ansa continued into the early 1900s.¹⁹⁷ Qua pottery was noted for its smooth, glossy black finish and

¹⁹⁵ Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria*, v. III, 933-934.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 933. According to Charles Partridge (then Acting District Commissioner of Obubra Hill district), "Pottery is made in most parts of the district, but only by the women . . . the potter sitting on the ground and building the vessel up from the base by deft use of her fingers, no mould of any kind being used. When finished, it is put in the sun to dry, and afterwards hardened in the smoke of a fire" (see *Cross River Natives*, 184). Talbot observed that prior to firing, "The surface is polished with a stone . . ." (Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria*, vol. III, 933). For further information on traditional pottery-making techniques in southeastern Nigeria, see Keith Nicklin, "The Location of Pottery Manufacture," *Man* 14, 3 (1979), 436-558; Keith Nicklin, "Pottery Production and Distribution in Southeast Nigeria," in eds. Hilary Howard and Elaine Morris, *Production and Distribution: a Ceramic Viewpoint* (Oxford: BAR International Series 120, 1981), 169-186; I. Arua and O. K. Oyeoku, "Clays and Afikpo Pottery in South-eastern Nigeria," *The Nigerian Field* 47 (1982), 27-38; Benjo Igwilo, "Traditional Pottery in Nigeria," *Nigeria Magazine* 14, 12 (1983), 35-46.

¹⁹⁷ Latham, 75.

while it has not been made for decades now (a naval base occupies much of the old land where the potters worked), the reputation of the Qua potters survives. The Calabar scholar Eyo Akak writes that, “[Qua pottery was] so smooth and good . . . that anyone who shaved his or her head was usually ridiculed as having the head which resembles Quas’ pots.”¹⁹⁸ Pottery-making at Nkpara probably ceased several generations ago, as no one in the village today can identify where the pots were made or fired.

In the 1970s, pottery was still made by one woman at Esuk Otu village, just outside Calabar. Nicklin reported that this potter, Mamayin Efa, was perhaps the last active potter in the area, as young women by then were not pursuing such traditional endeavors.¹⁹⁹ While today pottery is no longer produced in the Calabar area, other Nigerian wares are available in its main commercial center, Watt Market.²⁰⁰

Throughout the lower Cross River region today, a general term for a clay pot is the Efik “esio Umon,” or “Umon pot”—a reference to the island of Umon whose Biase traders have been the major supplier to pottery to the region in recent decades. This has caused some confusion in the literature, because much of the pottery the Biase sold was

¹⁹⁸ Akak, *The Quas: Origin and History*, 72.

¹⁹⁹ Nicklin, “Pottery Production and Distribution in Southeast Nigeria,” 181.

²⁰⁰ These include open-wick oil lamps from the Yoruba region in the southwest, and various Afikpo and Ibibio utilitarian wares from the Cross River region (the latter probably originating from Ndon Ebom village near Ikot Ekpene, according to Jill Salmons in a personal communication of 2004). The decoration of these examples is limited to lightly incised lines and hatching along with grooved rims. Such pots are mass-produced and examples of a particular type (e.g. cooking pot, storage vessel, etc) are virtually identical in terms of form and decoration. Nicklin also reported that “Ishibori pots [from Ogoja] were formerly traded down to Calabar: a journey of at least a week by canoe.” See Keith Nicklin, “Pottery of the Cross River Area, SE Nigeria,” (unpublished typescript manuscript for the U. C. L. Material Culture Seminar, 10, courtesy of Jill Salmons); “The Location of Pottery Manufacture, *Man* 14, 3 (1979), 453; *Guide to the Oron National Museum*, 34.

actually not made at Umon, but came from Afikpo and Ogoja.²⁰¹ This led some writers to conclude that the people of Umon did not make pottery at all, but were simply middlemen who traded Afikpo wares at Calabar and elsewhere.²⁰² However, in an unpublished essay, Keith Nicklin noted,

Throughout Ibibioland Umon pots are remembered for their superior strength, and were used mainly as cooking pots. Metal cooking ware is now widely used, and the export of pots from Umon appears to have declined. Pots are still made on the island, and at other sites in the vicinity of the banks of the Cross River in the area. However, the island was abandoned during the Biafran War [1967-1970], and pottery production is still in a much reduced state. The northern shore of the island, where the town is situated, is being eroded by the river, and this has revealed distinct archaeological deposits rich in ceramic material.²⁰³

The historian Stella Effa-Attoe provides additional evidence that the Biase people of Umon produced their own pottery and adds an important point—the decoration of this pottery included *nsibidi* signs.²⁰⁴

Cross River Ceramic Traditions: Afikpo and Igbo

Local competition for the pottery trade at Calabar came primarily from the potteries of the Igbo villages of Afikpo, on the middle Cross River.²⁰⁵ This area, as noted

²⁰¹ Nicklin, “Pottery Production and Distribution in Southeast Nigeria,” 181.

²⁰² See, for example, Stella Effah-Attoe, “Economic Diversification, Long Distance Trade and Politics in Biase, 1840-1950,” unpaginated manuscript to be published in *Akwanshi: Journal of the Calabar Museum Society* I, forthcoming.

²⁰³ Keith Nicklin, “Pottery of the Cross River Area, SE Nigeria,” 8, courtesy of Jill Salmons.

²⁰⁴ Effah-Attoe, “Economic Diversification, Long Distance Trade and Politics in Biase, 1840-1950,” np.

²⁰⁵ Latham, 72.

in Chapter Three, has a long history as a major center of pottery production.²⁰⁶ Afikpo pottery is widely regarded as the highest quality available and the output of Afikpo potters has been prodigious. By the 1960s, Afikpo was the major supplier to Calabar and the rest of the lower Cross River region, and much of the upper basin as well.²⁰⁷

Since the time Afikpo wares came to dominate the pottery markets of the lower Cross River region, a number of local operations have ceased production (such as those in the Calabar area). Yet, the success of Afikpo was only one of several factors affecting locale-scale production as will be discussed below. Today, Afikpo remains a major pottery-making center with several villages specializing in different pottery forms.²⁰⁸

Concerning the entire Igbo region, Talbot remarked, “Amid some Ibo sub-tribes, jars and bowls of graceful shape, often many mouthed and elaborately ornamented—especially those used for juju purposes—were to be seen in nearly every market-place . . .”²⁰⁹ Note here that the pots created specifically for use in ceremonial contexts were qualitatively different than pots meant for everyday domestic use.

²⁰⁶ For example, see Andrea Nicolls, *Igbo Pottery Traditions in the Light of Historical Antecedents and Present-day Realities* (Unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, University of Indiana, 1987); V. Emenike Chikwendu, *Cultural Succession and Continuity in S.E. Nigeria* (Oxford: BAR International Series 734, 1998).

²⁰⁷ Latham, 75; Nicklin, “Pottery Production and Distribution in Southeast Nigeria,” 183.

²⁰⁸ See Arua and Oyeoku, “Clays and Afikpo Pottery in South-eastern Nigeria;” Andrea Nicolls, “Local Pottery and Urban Ceramic Traditions in Certain Igbo Areas,” in ed. Christopher Roy, *Clay and Fire: Pottery in Africa* (Iowa City: School of Art and Art History, University of Iowa 2000), 129-148.

²⁰⁹ Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria*, v. III, 935.

Cross River Ceramic Traditions: Oron and Ibibio

Oron, situated on the opposite bank of the river from Calabar, nevertheless has significant historical ties to it, as attested by the Calabar-style terracottas found there by Ekpo Eyo (noted in Chapter Three). The Oron people do not make pottery, so in recent times they acquired what they needed from the Nsit²¹⁰ and other inland Ibibio groups,²¹¹ as well as from Afikpo via the Cross River. T. J. Mackenzie remarked ca. 1921 that Oron household furniture included “clay pots” and “water pots,” while a shrine erected to ward off disease contained “curious water-pots.”²¹² Mackenzie’s use of the qualifier “curious” apparently indicates that pots found in ritual contexts in Oron could be noticeably different than the pots employed in everyday household use. Talbot drew the same point regarding this area. At the Ibibio town of Ikotobo, he noticed a woman digging a distinctive blue clay, “from which beautiful funeral jars, as well as the common household pots, are made.”²¹³ Furthermore, Dorothy Talbot, paying special attention to pottery-making in this region, observed:

²¹⁰ See Efiog E. B. Edunam, “Oron Pre-Colonial Economy,” in Okon Edet Uya, *A History of Oron People* (Oron: Manson, 1984), 78; T. J. Mackenzie (quoting an Oron informant), “These waterpots are not made by the Oron people but by our neighbors to the North—the Nsit people;” see Mackenzie’s “Customs and Superstitions of the Efik People,” ca. 1921 (Part 1, subheading, “Water”), Special Collections, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, n.p.

²¹¹ Pottery-making remains widely dispersed throughout Ibibioland. Recent centers of production include: Ikot Abasi (Etinan L.G.A.); Ikot Ikwerre Itam and Ikot Ibom in Itam clan (Itu L.G.A.); Ikot Abaji (Ikot Abaji L.G.A.); Ndon Ebom, Ekpen Ukim, and Ituk Mbang in Uruan clan, and Ikot Esen, Iwok Obio Aduang, and Ikot Abasi in Eastern Nsit clan (Uyo L.G.A.), Itak Ikot Obioisi, Mbiafon and Nko Nto Nkono (Ikot Ekpen); Mbon Ebre and Ugbum (Abak), and Ikot Edidang (Eket). See Keith Nicklin, “Pottery Production and Distribution in Southeast Nigeria,” 177; Edet Uyo, *Who Are the Ibibio?* (Onitsha: African-FEP Publishers, 1983), 226.

²¹² T. J. Mackenzie, “Customs and Superstitions of the Efik People,” n.p.

²¹³ Talbot, *Life in Southern Nigeria*, 274.

To the feminine portion of the community . . . is owed the one Ibibio fine art—that of pottery. Without a wheel, or any aid save their own hands and a fragment of broken sherd, these women build up, from the blue clay of the locality, richly ornamented bowls and giant jars, which in beauty of line and decoration rival those which we discovered at Abijang and Nchopan on the Cross River, made by Ekoi [Ejagham] women potters. Among Ibibios this talent is given widest play in the creation of new forms for the vases and bowls placed upon burial mounds or within the erections built as memorials for dead chiefs. It is true that no trace of the graceful flying-buttress-like handles and slender necks of the Ekoi water jars has come to our notice here; but the forms of the vessels and the care expended on the raised decorative motifs are surely as fine as any in Africa.²¹⁴

This is a particularly important comment in that it highlights the creativity of the individual potter charged with designing new pieces destined for burials and memorial shrines. This negates the art historical discourse that long held African pottery to be (merely) craft—not art—and that African potters were overly bound by convention.

Keith Nicklin described a type of large Ibibio palm wine pot (*abang isong*) used in communal feasts on occasions such as marriages and funerals. He observed that “many of [these] pots have mysterious signs which appear to represent the *nsibidi* or secret writing which is no longer understood in the area.”²¹⁵ I have seen Nicklin’s field sketch of one such pot that is decorated with prominent arrow motifs and opposed arcs flanking a vertical line—designs that are conventional aspects of the *nsibidi* iconography, especially that associated with the Leopard Society.²¹⁶ Thus, Nicklin’s observations

²¹⁴ Dorothy Partridge, *Women’s Mysteries of a Primitive People*, 114-115.

²¹⁵ Keith Nicklin, “Abang Isong: The Ibibio ceremonial palm-wine pot,” *The Nigerian Field* 38, 4 (1973), 185.

²¹⁶ Keith Nicklin Fieldnotes, November 23, 1971, courtesy of Jill Salmons. Nicklin notes this particular example was dug from the earth, in an area that likely was an abandoned site for funerary shrines (see also Nicklin, “Abang Isong,” 187).

would seem to be further evidence that *nsibidi* appeared on pottery in the modern period. And while the Rev. Robert M'keown did not actually use the term "*nsibidi*" in his book about mission work among the Ibibio, perhaps he had such a pot in mind when he stated they "make earthenware adorned with ingenious devices."²¹⁷

Cross River Ceramic Traditions: The Ejagham Region

"The finest pottery of all," according to P. A. Talbot, ". . . is to be seen among the Ekoi,"²¹⁸ among whom "infinite pains are taken to mould even the water-pots into beautiful shapes" (Figs. 6.1-6.2).²¹⁹ As noted by Dorothy Talbot above, such pottery was made at Abijang and Nchopan. Partridge also noted that Ejagham pottery:

[was] made in most parts of the district, but only by the women The vessels present a great variety of shapes and sizes—there are large waterpots shaped like Romano-British and Saxon cinerary urns, basins and cups for cooking and eating purposes, beaker- or chalice-shaped cups with stem and foot, and various smaller utensils for medicine, juju messes, etc. Some are covered with a black glaze, others are painted red with camwood dye. The chief ornamental patterns are bands of concentric circles running round the brim, bands of parallel lines arranged in different directions, and a series of ellipsoid punch-marks.²²⁰

These Ejagham vessels bear some resemblance to the Calabar wares in their outlines, especially the pedestal bowls (Fig. 4.3).

Having then some idea of the areas of ceramic production in the Cross River region, we can now examine the major contexts in which ceramics were prominent, that

²¹⁷ Robert M'keown, *Twenty-Five Years in Qua Iboe* (London: Morgan and Scott, 1912), 36.

²¹⁸ Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria*, v. III, 935.

²¹⁹ Talbot, *In the Shadow of the Bush*, 287.

²²⁰ Partridge, *Cross River Natives*, 185.

is, apart from their basic utility in daily life as containers and cooking vessels. Like the ancient Calabar material, ceramics in this period were fundamental components in the sacred contexts of shrines and funeral rites, in which they could be grouped together in large numbers, at times inverted and/or intentionally broken.

Ceramics in Cross River Sacred Contexts

The following comments by Partridge, while specifically concerning the Obubra Hill District (a predominantly Ejagham area), could also describe the entire Cross River region:

At graves and juju places [i.e. shrines], earthen pots are buried up to the neck in the ground, and palm-wine or gin is from time to time poured down to quench the thirst of the disembodied spirit, and above ground are generally set a number of clay vessels containing little offerings, just like the candles offered in European churches before the images of patron-saints.²²¹

Colonial-era writers including Partridge frequently used terms such as “juju,” “medicine,” or “ghost offering” to distinguish the pottery of shrines from that used in household work. That this was often done to emphasize the locals’ “heathen” practices cannot be ignored.

While shrines containing local pottery are still known in the Cross River region, they were much more common before the widespread acceptance of Christianity during the colonial period (Fig. 6.3). Whether containing a single pot or a large number of them accumulated over time, shrines can be considered ultimately to be protective. They are loci for the offering of sacrifices to various spirits and gods to insure their continued and

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 184.

positive intercession with the world of the living, for example, in maintaining the fertility of land and people, warding off disease, or bringing success to personal endeavors. John Parkinson offers a typical report on a type of small shrine assemblage commonly found throughout the Calabar District:

Inside the village, in the public spaces and in the courtyards of the houses are numerous jars containing ‘medicine,’ supported on sticks with a tripod fork at the top They provide for the healing of various common complaints, for increase of family, for aid in childbirth, and many other purposes Amongst the components of these “medicine” erections, eggs figure prominently, and I have seen flat quartz pebbles, rings of doubly twisted wire, etc. . . . ²²²

The amount of pottery found in larger communal shrines could grow considerably over time because patrons routinely left pots containing various sacrificial items (food, drink, money, etc.). Thus, during his visit to the ruins of the once-great “Long Juju” shrine at Arochukwu, Partridge observed, “Around the [site] and in many parts of the surrounding bush, are numerous clay pots of all shapes and sizes, some buried mouth downwards, and most of them still unbroken.”²²³

As already noted, shrines constructed to honor and commemorate the dead generally contained ceramics as well as other personal goods. Pottery was also interred

²²² John Parkinson, “A Note of the Efik and Ekoi Tribes of the Eastern Province of Southern Nigeria,” *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* XXXVII (1907), 265. P. A. Talbot recounts a ceremony associated with a shrine of this description at Ekong, near Oban in the upper Cross River region, see *In the Shadow of the Bush*, 65-67 and pl. facing 66, 97, and pl. facing 226. See also Partridge 1905, 282, 285, 288, 299; Talbot, *Life in Southern Nigeria*, 7, 10, 13, 37, 39, 128, 143, 170, 189, 303, 308; Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria*, v. II, 131 (“Nimm” shrine); William J. Ward, *In and Around the Oron Country* (London: Hammond, 1913), 50-51. See also the photograph of an Ugep anti-smallpox shrine that includes pottery in Nicklin, *Ekpu: The Oron Ancestor Figures of South Eastern Nigeria*, 81.

²²³ Partridge, 58.

with the dead during burial.²²⁴ Europeans working in the Cross River region after colonization continued to describe funerary practices as a matter of course. Talbot revealed something of the ubiquity of pottery in this context when he noted that the Ibibio memorial shrines lining the road between Itak and Atiabang contained, in addition to their relics, “the usual pots.”²²⁵

Depending on locality and the status of the deceased, memorial shrines could be erected at the actual site of the burial, in which case they could be described as grave markers, but they were set up in other locations as well. Of course, relatively few people received the sort of grand treatments accorded the Efik elite, such as King Archibong and the trader called Iron Bar, described in Chapter Five. In Ibibioland, according to Talbot, “Lesser men are merely provided with little huts containing native pots, some of beautiful shape and elaborate decoration,” a description that is applicable to the shrine in Fig. 6.4.²²⁶ Women’s memorials also included pottery.²²⁷

The deaths of very young children necessitated a different kind of response. As Dorothy Talbot observed:

Among the Ibibios . . . the bodies of babes who die within a few days of birth may not be buried like those to whom a fuller life span was given, but are laid in an earthen bowl which is then placed, inverted, in a shallow hole scooped by the side of the road Many such upturned pots may be seen along the paths near Akaiya . . .²²⁸

²²⁴ For example, see Talbot, *Life in Southern Nigeria*, 154, 157 (Efik burials); *In the Shadow of the Bush*, 221; Partridge, 238 (Ejagham burial).

²²⁵ Talbot, *Life in Southern Nigeria*, 323.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 143, 274.

²²⁷ See the photograph captioned, “A Woman’s Memorial,” in Dorothy Talbot, *Women’s Mysteries of a Primitive People*, 216.

²²⁸ D. Talbot, *Womens’ Mysteries of a Primitive People*, 168, 213-14.

Ceramic Figurines

Ceramic figurines, while much less common than pots, were invariably connected to the spiritual realm. Talbot reported several different types located throughout the Cross River region. He noted that the Ibibio image called “‘Mbiam . . . is represented sometimes as a strange monster, half human, half bestial, moulded in terracotta.”²²⁹ He reported of the Ejagham, “The only clay statues seen by me among the Ekoi were those representing Nimm priestesses, placed above their graves,”²³⁰ though Partridge wrote of an Ejagham shrine containing clay figures.²³¹ Talbot also came across some anthropomorphic ceramics among the Igbo that, based on his drawings, curiously resemble the ancient Calabar examples. He remarked, “The Abaw Ibo of Ase, on the Ndonni Creek, make curious pots to the memory of their ancestors, on which the features of their forefathers are represented” (Fig. 6.5).²³²

Elsewhere in eastern Nigeria, as well as western Cameroon,²³³ the making of anthropomorphic ceramics continues. Concerning the Gongola River region of northeastern Nigeria, Marla Berns described a number of groups who produce pots with human features. For example, the Yungur memorialize deceased men of ruling families by fashioning ceramic figurines, called *wiiso*, which serve as receptacles for ancestral

²²⁹ Talbot, *Life in Southern Nigeria*, 46.

²³⁰ Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria*, vol. II, 133.

²³¹ Partridge, 222-226.

²³² P. A. Talbot, *Tribes of the Niger Delta: Their Religion and Customs* (London. 1932; reprint, London: Frank Cass, 1967), 256. See also Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria*, v. II, 315.

²³³ For example, see Viviane Baeke, “Water spirits and witchcraft: Rituals, myths and objects, Mfumte-Wuli, western Cameroon,” in ed. Luc de Heusch, *Objects: Signs of Africa* (Tervuren: Snoeck-Ducaju and Zoon, 1995), 57-92; Wittmer and Arnett; and Gebauer.

spirits (Fig. 6.6).²³⁴ Made predominately by women, *wiiso* display some features of Yungur body decoration, such as pierced ears, chipped teeth, and scarification, which reveal their family affiliation and oftentimes even their specific personal identity. They are kept in shrines in which Yungur leaders seek to maintain good relations with the ancestors. The figurines, as Berns makes clear, are not mute memorials to the dead, but serve as mnemonic devices reminding present-day Yungur leaders both of their legacy and of their responsibility and power to affirm and maintain the social order.²³⁵

European Ceramics in the Cross River Region

The popularity of European glazed ceramics and other “china” has grown so much during the modern period that today they have replaced local earthenwares in many settings. As Keith Nicklin noted in 1977, “In the Cross River region imported fancy pottery has long been popular for domestic, decorative and ritual uses. English ‘Toby Jugs’ can be seen on chiefs’ sideboards and in shrines to this day in such places as Arochukwu and Calabar.”²³⁶ Toby jugs are a kind of ceramic figural jug popularized in England in the eighteenth century. They typically depict a man wearing a tri-corn hat and other period dress, while smoking a pipe or drinking—in other words, a man of some status partaking of costly tobacco and drink, an iconography that would understandably

²³⁴ See Berns, “Pots as People: Yungur Ancestral Portraits,” “Ceramic Arts in Africa,” “Ga’anda Scarification: A Model for Art and Identity,” and “Ceramic Clues: Art History in the Gongola Valley.”

²³⁵ Berns, “Pots as People: Yungur Ancestral Portraits,” 52.

²³⁶ Keith Nicklin, “European Replicas of Traditional African Art Objects in Their Cultural Contexts,” *Baessler-Archiv*, Neue Folge, Band XXV (1977), 244.

resonate among accomplished (titled) men of the Cross River region, whose headgear and other distinctive personal effects (e.g. pipes, cups, staffs) set them apart socially. At

Akai, near the Oron-Eket road, P. A. Talbot noticed a shrine:

. . . sheltering the conventional ‘ghost offerings’ of beautifully shaped bowls and jars. These are broken on the side hidden from spectators, as is also the case with the delicately tinted pieces of fine old china, among which ‘Toby jugs’ are often to be found, chosen out by their owner from his treasure-house many years before death, and set apart for the purpose of adorning his tomb.²³⁷

Talbot elsewhere reported that ceramic “cottage figures” and “beautiful old Dutch pieces” of china were displayed during the second funeral of a chief of Oban (Ejagham),²³⁸ and the grave of an Efik Calabar chief and Ekpe member included, “jars, dishes and bowls of fine china . . .”²³⁹ These Toby jugs and “cottage figures” likely took the place of figurative or anthropomorphic ceramics that formerly were made locally. In any case, there can be little doubt that imported ceramics, combined with the influx of affordable enamel, metal, glass, and plastic vessels, has had a tremendous impact on the production of locally-made earthenwares.

Considering then the modern uses of ceramics in the Cross River region alongside the ancient works from Calabar, there are strong correspondences in terms of their function, especially as regards their place in such sacred contexts as shrines and funeral rituals. Though demonstrating a strong current of cultural continuity in terms of the

²³⁷ Talbot, *Life in Southern Nigeria*, 276; John Parkinson also saw a “toby vase” among other objects in an Ejagham shrine, but could not learn much about the assemblage, probably because he was an outsider. He explained, “The chiefs of the village contrived to evade all questions concerning the ceremony of which these things were significant” (Parkinson, 267).

²³⁸ Talbot, *In the Shadow of the Bush*, 223.

²³⁹ Talbot, *Life in Southern Nigeria*, 157.

underlying structure of these settings, they have certainly not been static in practice. The willingness of peoples throughout the region to incorporate foreign imports into their most cherished communal events undeniably attests to a long-standing cultural penchant for innovation, evident also in the widespread diffusion across ethnic and linguistic lines of certain institutions, art forms, and their attendant visual culture. The case of *nsibidi* and related motifs represents a particularly good example of this practice.

Nsibidi

As mentioned in the Chapter One, *nsibidi* is a polyvalent sign system having performative (i.e. gestural), graphic, and physical components. Here, I focus on the graphic aspect. Within the context of institutions such as *Ekpe* [the Efik Leopard Society] it was, according to Amaeshi, “a widely-used vehicle of communication, for record keeping, and warning against immediate danger.”²⁴⁰ Talbot described *nsibidi* as “a kind of primitive secret writing practiced among the Semi-Bantu. Particularly the Ekoi, who claim to have originated it; but it would appear to have come from very ancient times. It is chiefly carried out by means of poker-work on calabashes, canoes, the wooden paraphernalia of the Ekkpe Club, stools, etc., but occasionally by cicatrization on the body and dye marks on the face.”²⁴¹ He also noted that, “For a long time messages have been sent in Nsibidi script, cut or painted on split palm stems.”²⁴² Kalu, in his

²⁴⁰ Basil Amaeshi, “Sources for West African Studies: Some Non-Alphabetic Writings of West Africa,” 5.

²⁴¹ Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria*, v. III, 932; see also Talbot, *In the Shadow of the Bush*, 305-309.

²⁴² Talbot, *In the Shadow of the Bush*, 309.

critical review of *nsibidi* historiography, states that it served variously as “identity label, public notice, private warning, declaration of taboos, amorous messages, reckoning of goods and money, and keeping of records and decorations.”²⁴³

Nsibidi appears in a great variety of media. The signs have been inscribed on the ground; dyed and stitched on cloth (Figs. 1.6, 6.15-6.16); incised, drawn, and burned on calabashes and wood carvings (drums, stools, fans, headdresses and other masquerade paraphernalia) (Figs. 6.7-6.9); punched and incised on brass trays (Fig. 6.10); painted and chalked on buildings (Fig. 6.19); and painted, drawn and cut onto the human body (Figs. 1.7, 6.17-6.18, 6.23).

Nsibidi iconography contains hundreds of signs (Figs. 1.3, 6.11-6.12), some borrowed from neighboring practices, such the Igbo graphic design called *uli*.²⁴⁴ Some signs are pictographic (e.g. crocodile, leopard, mirror), but many more are abstract (e.g. arcs, cruciforms, grids, circles, spirals, etc.). The Ejagham, as reported by Talbot in 1926, drew from a corpus of decorative motifs when incising brasswork and pottery, and when painting the human body for ceremonial occasions (Fig. 6.13). His description reads like the inventory of ancient Calabar motifs described in Chapter Four: “The most common geometrical forms met with are circular dots, concentric circles, hatching, chevrons, herringbone, stars, lozenges, spirals and guilloche.”²⁴⁵ Furthermore, considering that most peoples of the Cross River region trace their roots to southwestern

²⁴³ Kalu, 83.

²⁴⁴ Kalu, 84.

²⁴⁵ Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria*, 935. Partridge similarly noted among the Ejagham that the motif of concentric circles was a “chief ornamental pattern,” (186).

Cameroon, it should not be surprising that elaborate geometric body decoration in the form of lines, arcs, angles, circles, arrows, among other designs, has been noted there, too (Fig. 6.14).²⁴⁶

Among the more prominent examples of *nsibidi* in the public sphere is the cloth known as *ukara*, worn as a wrapper by Leopard Society members on formal occasions such as initiations, coronations, and funerals of members (Figs. 6.15-6.16). Its conventional design is composed of a “grid” made of small rectangular sections containing a variety of contrasting designs (grids, arrows, cruciforms, reptiles, alternating triangles, double-gongs/rattles, and feathers are among the more conventional symbols). Some of these are purely abstract and refer specifically to Leopard Society ideology (e.g. small repeating triangles and quadrangles refer to the leopard’s claws and therefore signify the group’s power), while other designs represent objects seen also in other contexts (e.g. double-gongs/rattles and feathers are common attributes of leadership; and manilas, the defunct currency form). Over this “grid” are placed larger-scale images of powerful creatures associated with the group (e.g. leopard, crocodile, serpent) and figures of their masquerades. In the context of the Leopard Society meeting-house, *ukara* cloths are hung to demarcate sacred space from common space.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁶ See D. Hutter (et al.), *Das Überseeische Deutschland* (Stuttgart: Union Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft, 1890), 141; Albert Calvert, *The Cameroons* (London: T. Werner Laurie, 1917), pl. 42; Phillippe Laburthe-Tolra, *Initiations et Sociétés Secrètes au Cameroun* (Paris: Editions Karthala, 1985), 122, 350, 368, 372.

²⁴⁷ Herbert Cole and Chike Aniakor, *Igbo Arts: Community and Cosmos* (Los Angeles: Museum of Cultural History, UCLA, 1984), 59-61. See also Partridge, “[A] kind of waist-cloth...being about seven and a half feet long by about two feet wide; upon it is printed, blue on white, a chequer pattern alternating with one resembling birds’ feathers” (184); and Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria*, v. III, “Among the Mbembe the Nyampkpe [Leopard Society] is only joined by rich men Before the arrival of Government, only its members were allowed to wear a singlet, shirt, an Ukara cloth made at Ezilor or ivory bracelet, or to have an elephant tusk horn” (787).

Ukara, furthermore, is another prime example of the innovation and diffusion of visual culture in the Cross River area. The cloths are commissioned to certain Cross River Igbo groups who design them using imported cotton fabric, then sent north to Nkalagu to be dyed with indigo using a sewn-and-tied technique borrowed ultimately from the Jukun in the Benue River region north of the Cross River (one of whose capitals bore the similar name, Wukari).²⁴⁸ Calabar remains a distribution point for hand-made *ukara*, but it is becoming prohibitively expensive for local people to commission. When I visited Watt Market in 2004, cheaper factory-printed *ukara* was available alongside the traditional version.

In preparation for important occasions, Leopard Society members also paint their bodies with *nsibidi*. As Ward noted in 1913, “When a person has just been received into membership he parades the streets, exhibiting on his . . . body the mystic signs of [Ekpe] chalked thereon in several colours.”²⁴⁹ Members also decorate their bodies for other transitional moments, such as the initiations and funerals of fellow members (Figs. 1.7, 6.17-6.18) or the installation of a new paramount ruler, who generally would be a member. The body designs often include circles, arcs, lines, and cruciforms.²⁵⁰ Similar motifs are echoed on Leopard Society meeting-houses, which because of their decoration, were unmistakable in the community (Figs. 6.19-6.19a). According to Parkinson in

²⁴⁸ Cole and Ross, 59-61; Maria Kecskési, *African Masterpieces and Selected Works from Munich: The Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde* (New York: The Center for African Art, 1978), 217.

²⁴⁹ Ward, 38.

²⁵⁰ Images of Leopard Society initiates with painted *nsibidi* on their torsos are included in, among others, Eyo Okon Akak, *Efiks of Old Calabar*, vol. III (Calabar: Akak and Sons, 1982), 294; Udo, 55; *Costumes*, Cross River State Traditions 2 (Calabar: Cross River State Ministry of Information, nd), 11; Monica Visonà *et al.*, *A History of Art in Africa* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001), 279.

1907, “no village in the Efik or Ekoi country exists where the Egbo [i.e. Leopard Society] house does not occupy the most prominent position and form the most conspicuous object.”²⁵¹ The often overtly cruciform assemblages hung inside them act as a sort of charter for the group (Fig. 6.20).²⁵²

While Leopard Society meeting houses may have been the most recognizable decorated structures in the region, they were not the only decorated structures. Apart from shrines, private residences were frequently painted with various motifs, although it is not clear from the sources who owned these houses. Some, no doubt, were owned by Leopard Society members, considering that the great majority of men in any community would have been initiates, while others could have reflected membership in women’s groups. Moreover, sources indicate that women generally did wall paintings.²⁵³ In 1899, De Cardi remarked that in upper-class Efik houses, “The inner walls, especially of the courtyards, are in most cases tastefully decorated with paintings, somewhat resembling the arabesque designs one sees among the Moors.”²⁵⁴ And regarding Ejagham houses, Partridge noted, “the outer side of the front wall is often painted with bold designs in

²⁵¹ Parkinson 1907, 262. For additional images of Leopard Society painted designs, see Alfred Mansfeld, *Urwald-Dokumente* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 1908), 146-149; Talbot, 257 and insert facing 257.

²⁵² See Keith Nicklin, “An Ejagham Emblem of the Ekpe Society,” *Barbier-Mueller Museum Tribal Art Bulletin* (1991), 3-18.

²⁵³ For example, see Talbot, *In the Shadow of the Bush*, 290; Hugh Goldie, *Calabar and its Mission* (Edinburgh and London: Oliphant Anderson and E. Ferrier, 1890), 17-18.

²⁵⁴ De Cardi, 554-555.

black and white, or with elaborate geometrical patterns in black, white, red, and yellow.”²⁵⁵

Nsibidi *Societies*

The Leopard Society is not the only men’s institution associated with *nsibidi*, although it is now certainly the most prominent one. According to Talbot:

In the Ekoi folklore there is occasionally a mention of the Nsibidi (or Nchibbidi) Society, which was apparently in existence long before even the Ekkpe Club. Only chiefs might belong to it, and its seven Images [i.e. masquerades] acted as the executioners of those sentenced to death. It is possible that the Nsibidi writing . . . was developed among its members as a method of communication or, perhaps with greater likelihood, its use was kept up by them long after it had been forgotten outside their circle.²⁵⁶

Talbot believed the name was derived from the Ejagham word, “nchibbi,” which he defined as, “‘to turn,’ and this has taken to itself the meaning of agility of mind, and therefore of cunning or double meaning.”²⁵⁷ Ruel also mentioned an *Nsibiri* Society that was said to have predated the acquisition of the Leopard Society at the Banyang village of Nchang and noted that a prominent section of the modern Banyang Leopard Society is called *Nsibiri Nkanda*.²⁵⁸ Similarly, the Widekum of the upper Cross River region of Cameroon had a society called *Nchibi*, with a masquerade of the same name, whose costume featured a bold geometric design of two connected angles creating a lozenge

²⁵⁵ Partridge, 176.

²⁵⁶ Talbot, 792

²⁵⁷ Talbot, *In the Shadow of the Bush*, 305.

²⁵⁸ Ruel, 202.

(Fig. 6.21).²⁵⁹ Mansfeld also remarked that the Ejagham of Cameroon had a society called “Ndschebbe.”²⁶⁰

Related groups are still active in the lower Cross River region, although there is little published information about them. A masquerade costume seen by the author in the Oron Museum in 2004, called *Nnabo*, had the following description on its label:

Nnabo, otherwise known as Idem Nsibidi, is very prominent among the people of Ekoi, Quas, Efik of Cross River State and Idua in Oro [Oron] area of Akwa Ibom State. This masquerade is part of Ekpe which was used for the implementation of the decisions of the Ekpe cult members.²⁶¹

Ekpo Eyo refers to *Nnabo* as “the executioners” (Fig. 6.22).²⁶² And, because the Leopard Society is associated with a Leopard Spirit, Uya identifies “Nsibidi” in this context as a “martial diety.”²⁶³ The costume itself bears skulls and large-scale *nsibidi* signs (including arcs, circles, and cruciforms), boldly delineated with cowrie shells, the outmoded currency.²⁶⁴ The performance of *Nnabo* is an unpredictable affair with the masquerader moving about forcefully, taunting onlookers with aggressive gestures.²⁶⁵ Its abstracted, wholly unnaturalistic form could not be farther removed from the body-hugging knit

²⁵⁹ Frederick Migeod, *Through British Cameroons* (London: Heath Cranton Limited, 1925), 82; see also Nicklin and Salmons, “Cross River Art Styles,” 29.

²⁶⁰ Alfred Mansfeld, typescript document concerning “Ikom” heads, The British Museum, Department of Ethnography, Museum of Mankind Archives, London, ETH. DOC. 237.

²⁶¹ Label text, Oron Museum (Oron, Nigeria), August 18, 2004. The Ibibio also had a version of this society that was distinct from the Leopard Society. According to one Ibibio scholar, “Similar to Ekpe was Nsibidi. Nsibidi and Ekpe had secret signs known only to members.” See Uyo, *Who Are the Ibibio?*, 54.

²⁶² Ekpo Eyo, personal communication, 18 August 2004.

²⁶³ Uya, *A History of Oron People*, 37.

²⁶⁴ See Ekpo Eyo, *Nigeria and the Evolution of Money*, 42-44, 58.

²⁶⁵ Onyile Onyile (Georgia Southern University), personal communication, 29 September 2004.

costumes of the Leopard Society masquerades (Fig. 6.18). Its emphasis on the archaic cowrie shell currency might suggest that *Nnabo* is not a recent invention as is, for example, the *Ikem* masquerade with its naturalistic female headdress, or *Obasinjom*, the anti-witchcraft masquerade—both of which date to the early twentieth century.²⁶⁶

Considering the function of the *Nnabo/Nsibidi* masquerade, the signs it bore would have been immediately associated with the awesome power to carry out society's ultimate penalty upon those who egregiously violate the law. It was power incarnate and thus it is not surprising that it has been found throughout the Cross River region, considering the similar dispersal of the Leopard Society. It is, however, curious why *Nnabo* has not garnered more attention from researchers focusing their attention on the Leopard Society. Perhaps, because it was a separate (not subsidiary) institution to the Leopard Society, combined with its powerful function (one, moreover, not associated with trade), kept it hidden from outsiders. In any case, it could be that this archaic form of the Nsibidi/Nchibiddi Society contributed to an early diffusion of meaningful signs throughout the Cross River region, only to be superceded by a more prestigious Leopard Society at some later point in time, likely as a consequence of the transatlantic slave trade. That is, after the Efiks of Old Calabar, having obtained the Leopard Society from their Qua (Ejagham) or Efut neighbors, turned it into a more complex institution with the addition of costly grades and accoutrements allowed by their success in trading with

²⁶⁶ See Keith Nicklin and Jill Salmons, "Ikem: The History of a Masquerade in Southeast Nigeria," in ed. Sidney Kasfir, *West African Masks and Cultural Systems* (Tervuren: Koninklijk Museum voor Midden-Afrika and Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale, 1988), 128-129; Hans-Joachim Koloss, "Obasinjom among the Ejagham," *African Arts* 28, 2 (1985), 63.

Europeans.²⁶⁷ This Efik-ized Leopard Society then became the model institution in the Cross River region for anyone seeking to gain from the lucrative new overseas trade.²⁶⁸ Perhaps the northern version of Nchibiddi, like the Efik's own Ndem water spirit cult, could not maintain its position with the currents of history shifting from internal to external affairs.²⁶⁹

While in Calabar today, *nsibidi* is primarily identified with the Leopard Society, this is not fully indicative of the broader scope of the usage of *nsibidi* and similar designs throughout the Cross River region. In fact, *nsibidi* was and remains closely associated with women as well as men. As Carlson learned among the Ejagham peoples:

Nsibiri literacy is negotiated along gender lines. And, when women do have access to it, they use *nsibiri* differently than men. Furthermore, *nsibiri* is often used to express cultural concepts that rely upon gendered metaphors. These concepts expressed with *nsibiri* are deeply rooted in Ejagham systems of thought.²⁷⁰

Indeed, the early twentieth-century literature reveals the great extent to which *nsibidi* usage traversed gender boundaries in the Cross River region, not only metaphorically, in terms of the objects people used, but literally, in terms of the actual bodies of men and women. Hence, Talbot observed, "The most usual forms [of body decoration in southern Nigeria] are . . . circles of concentric rings common amongst Semi-Bantu [meaning Ejagham among others]. The other most popular designs are triangle, circles with radii,

²⁶⁷ See Simon Ottenberg and Linda Knudson, "Leopard Society Masquerades: Symbolism and Diffusion," *African Arts* 18, 2 (1985), 43-44.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁹ On the decline of the Ndem cult vis-à-vis Ekpe in Calabar, see Latham, 35.

²⁷⁰ Carlson, xvi.

crosses and stars.”²⁷¹ One evidently very popular form of body painting with *nsibidi* was reserved for young girls (Fig. 6.23). According to Talbot:

In the interior [of the Cross River region], children and young girls still have their bodies painted with designs made by black vegetable dyes. The most usual of these is extracted from the rhizome of the little flower “Ibiri Nsi,” much like a wild hyacinth [which “turned,” begs another possible derivation for “nsibiri”]. Young women and children are also fond of ornamenting their faces, especially their foreheads, with designs in various colours. The absolute mastery of outline shown by these...is far beyond the average expected from Europeans. The variety of such patterns is extraordinary. *Several hundred sketches were made by my wife and her sister—indeed, the supply seemed inexhaustible.* The outlines are often filled in with Nsibidi writing, and sometimes a girl’s whole life-history is proclaimed in this manner. Such patterns are always traced by a female relative, usually the aunt of the person decorated [emphasis added].²⁷²

More recently, Carlson observed that in the practice of Ejagham women’s body painting (and calabash pyroengraving), “there is no overt emphasis on secrecy or the mediation of power [It] marks critical events that involve social transformations or elements of the unknown or even danger.”²⁷³

One such institution of social transformation for young women in the Cross River region is the period of isolation and education that precedes their “coming out” as an adult, which announces to the community their availability for marriage. The young lady is known variously as *Mbopo* among the Ibibio, *Nhukgo* among the Oron, *Nkuho* among the Efik, and *Moninkem* among the Ejagham).²⁷⁴ Often called the “fattening house”

²⁷¹ Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria*, v. II, 392; see also Partridge, who noted cicatrices in the form of concentric circles on the face (pp. 170-171) and body painting, “done as ‘medicine,’ as forming part of certain religious and social ceremonies, and for purely ornamental purposes (168) Geometrical patterns are most in favour, and are sometimes quite intricate” (p. 169).

²⁷² Talbot, *Shadow of the Bush*, 320 and pl. facing 319.

²⁷³ Carlson, 216.

²⁷⁴ See Jill Salmons, “Fat is Beautiful,” *Art Links* (September, 1981), 23-25; Akak, *Efiks of Old Calabar*, v.

because the initiate's rich diet during seclusion could cause significant weight gain, the ceremony of her "coming out" was marked, in part, with elaborate painting and dressing of her body. The designs include concentric circles, spirals, angles, and other curvilinear and geometric patterns.²⁷⁵ The Ibibio in particular have specialized in creating wood figures to commemorate these young women (Fig 6.24). It could be that the large Calabar Type IV figurine of an elaborately decorated woman (Fig. 4.134) is another example of this subject.

The Scottish missionary J. K. Macgregor met a woman who described another means by which the knowledge of *nsibidi* was transmitted. She claimed to own a cloth sewn with *nsibidi* by her grandmother, which her mother used in teaching *nsibidi* in a school setting in Abiriba.²⁷⁶ This cloth, which Macgregor believed to be at least sixty years old at the time, may well have been an example of sewn-resist *ukara*, which are in fact made in Abiriba.²⁷⁷

Talbot and Macgregor both offered additional information that *nsibidi* could convey detailed information in narrative form. "The use of *nsibidi* is that of ordinary writing," according to Macgregor, "I have in my possession a copy of the record of a

III, 317-334; Uya, 51; Okon Umoetuk, "Body Art in Ibibio Culture," *Nigeria Magazine* 53, 2 (1985), 40-56; Ute Röschenthaler, "Honoring Ejagham Women," *African Arts* 31, 2 (1998), 38-49, 92, 93; Carlson, esp. Ch. 8, "Adornment and Display: Writing on the Body," 202-219.

²⁷⁵ See, for example, *Costumes*, Cross River State Traditions 2.; Umoetuk, Salmons, "Fat is Beautiful."

²⁷⁶ Macgregor, "Some Notes on *Nsibidi*," 212.

²⁷⁷ Cole and Aniakor, 59-61.

court case from a town on the Enion [Enyong] Creek taken down in it, and every detail, except the evidence, is most graphically described” (Fig. 6.25).²⁷⁸

It would be mistaken, however, to assume that such records in *nsibidi* would necessarily have been “readable” throughout the Cross River region, as would a book today. Yet, while the meaning of *nsibidi* may change according to one’s locality and level of membership within particular associations, it seems clear that within one’s peer group, *nsibidi* could indeed function as written texts. Certainly in the context of a group such as the Leopard Society, which has had affiliate chapters throughout the region at least since the late eighteenth century, *nsibidi* served an important unifying purpose. Hence, considering the multiple contexts in which *nsibidi* functions for both men and women, Carlson maintains, “By providing a language that is not dependent on verbal communication, it allowed for linkages between the numerous peoples in the Cross River region.”²⁷⁹ Therefore, the questions before us now concern not *if* visual systems such as *nsibidi* functioned to unify the diverse peoples of that region, but how? And for how long has this been the case? What factors contributed to their dispersal, diversity, and development? With continued investigation, the Calabar terracottas may provide insight into these issues more deeply than I have been able to do here. But it is already clear that they have opened entirely new chapters in the history of Calabar and the Cross River region.

²⁷⁸ Macgregor, 212; Talbot, *In the Shadow of the Bush*, 306, 453-461.

²⁷⁹ Carlson, xvi.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CALABAR TERRACOTTAS: PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

European Imports and Their Impact on Local Ceramic Production

During the period following 1885, potters in the Cross River region faced increasing competition from the imported European wares that had been popular since the late eighteenth century, as noted in the account of the Captain John Adams mentioned in Chapter Five (“ . . . mugs, jugs, basins, plates, &c.; mugs with covers always sell well.”) The reports following Adams show that the demand for imported ceramics—and containers in other materials (e.g. glass and metal)—only seemed to increase.

What then was the effect of these imports on local pottery production? While I agree with Latham that imported ceramics per se probably did not overly harm local production around Calabar in the early years, his statement that the Nkpara potteries north of Calabar were “flourishing” in the 1840s is perhaps an overstatement considering the published comments of his source, Waddell, merely state, “[At Nkpara] the women, at least some of them, were employed in pottery work in the street.”²⁸⁰ Further, it is not known what types of ceramics were created there. Were they mostly utilitarian vessels or the more time-consuming ceremonial pots?

In any case, one thing to consider here is that during the 1800s, a major factor that likely stimulated local production of ceramic storage vessels was the palm oil trade, in which pots were used for processing and transporting the oil. This industry grew

²⁸⁰ Waddell, 361-362; Latham, 75.

tremendously in the decades following the abolishment of the transatlantic slave trade in 1807.²⁸¹ The amount of palm oil exported from Old Calabar between 1812-1817 was 1,200 tons, but by 1883 the figure had increased more than sixfold, peaking above 7,300 tons.²⁸²

While ceramic production increased to serve the export market, there seems to have been an opposite effect in terms of what ceramics local people used for themselves. For example, in the early twentieth century, Talbot remarked that in the town of Inua Abassi, he commonly saw “cheap crockery. . . of modern European manufacture” in private compounds.²⁸³ Based on his long residence in southern Nigeria, Talbot also observed:

Amid some Ibo sub-tribes, jars and bowls of graceful shape, often many mouthed and elaborately ornamented—especially those used for juju purposes—were to be seen in nearly every market-place, but during the last ten years the manufacture of any save those of the coarsest and simplest type seems to have stopped; this is doubtless due to the introduction of the European earthen and enamel ware²⁸⁴

Meanwhile, according to Latham:

European earthenware does not seem to have had an adverse affect on local potteries [of the Calabar region], as the Nkpara potteries were flourishing in the [18]40s, and pottery was made at Ikot Ansa, a Qua village close to Old Town, until the early 1900s. Indeed, the challenges came not from Europe, but from Afikpo, which now [the 1960s] supplies the lower Cross River. Traditional types of pottery are still widely used despite the competition of European pots, pans, and enamelware

²⁸¹ Latham, 55.

²⁸² Latham, 151.

²⁸³ Talbot, *Life in Southern Nigeria*, 308-9. Talbot elsewhere notes that he was shown old Dutch pottery, brought by the “early traders,” see *In the Shadow of the Bush*, 223.

²⁸⁴ Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria*, v. III, 935.

While this remains essentially true—traditional pottery is still made in the Cross River region, and Afikpo has become the region’s dominant supplier²⁸⁵—Latham is perhaps too general in his characterization of ceramic production. For example, he does not evaluate the specific types of pots that were being made (i.e. utilitarian, ceremonial, or some combination thereof), nor does he adequately account for the contraction in the number of local production sites. In other words, what were the underlying factors that allowed Afikpo to dominate the regional pottery trade?

Certainly the particular types of pots made at the time of Latham’s writing were different from those made during the early colonial period as observed by the Talbots, Partridge, and others. The pottery for sale in the Calabar region today—which is largely from Afikpo—is plain or minimally adorned, not at all like the elaborately decorated wares formerly made for ceremonial uses. Furthermore, the creation of anthropomorphic ceramic figurines is now a lost art in the lower Cross Region.

European imports (including objects as well as ideology) had a considerable effect upon local pottery production, particularly concerning those objects made for traditional rituals (e.g. Toby jugs being a popular alternative to ceramic figurines that otherwise, one presumes, would have been made locally).

Thus, not surprisingly, for the peoples of the Calabar area (and considering the evidence, the Efiks especially), their increasing commerce with the West led to a greater demand for things Western. The more they purchased European ceramics, the less they

²⁸⁵ Nicklin, “The Location of Pottery Manufacture,” 454-455, which includes a summation of the earlier findings of S. and P. Ottenberg (1962) and A. J. H. Latham (1973). See also Nicklin’s, “Pottery Production and Distribution in Southeast Nigeria,” 177 and Nicolls, *Igbo Pottery Traditions in the Light of Historical Antecedents and Present-Day Realities*, 137-149.

would have patronized the local potters of Ikot Ansa, Esuk Otu, or Nkpara. Thus, the demand in Calabar for imported ceramics since the eighteenth century (if not earlier), was driven by a combination of factors involving both the function of the pots and the status they would bestow upon their owners—they were exotic and fashionable, as well as more durable substitutes for local ceramics in some circumstances (e.g. serving food), but not others (e.g. cooking food). They were often incorporated into traditional rituals, especially those surrounding death and the furnishing of shrines dedicated to various deities and ancestors.

Over the last century, local domestic and ritual pottery has been increasingly supplemented by imported ceramics, glassware, and the virtually-indestructible modern aluminum cookware and cheap plastic containers. Thus occurred alongside increasing missionary success, which garnered a decline in the observance of traditional rituals and the special pots and figurines that were integral to them. Modernity has even brought disdain for the local arts: “Why should I go for such traditional products when we are in the jet age?,” questions the trader Sikiru in the Nigerian *Post Express* newspaper, “How will a stranger feel if you serve him food with the clay pot?”²⁸⁶

While modernity does not always look favorably upon traditional Nigerian arts, archaeology allows for a different view. Since as early as the fifth century A.D., there have been communities of people in the Calabar area who accessed long-distance trade routes, utilized complex iron-working technology, and maintained sophisticated ceramic, weaving, and other artistic traditions over hundreds of years. Yet we do not know if by

²⁸⁶ Uche Anyamele, “The Challenge of Polymer and Metallurgical Industries: Does the Potter Still Have a Will?,” *Post Express* (February 5, 2001), quoted from www.postexpresswired.com, August 2, 2002.

the time Europeans arrived, these people had already moved away from Calabar, or were assimilated by some others, or if their descendants are indeed still living in the area today. In any case, there is yet no evidence that their ceramic tradition survived in Calabar after about 1500—but that is not to say that such evidence does not exist in the ground. While more archaeological work is certainly needed, it is clear the basic iconography—if not always the forms—of the old terracottas *has* survived, and survives today, throughout the Cross River region in a wide variety of media and contexts utilized by men and women and children alike.

Nsibidi: Some Historical Implications

The widespread similarities of this iconography also cause one to re-evaluate the prevailing wisdom that ethnic groups in the Cross River region during pre-colonial times were predisposed to distrusting outsiders, and that neighboring groups, if not continually at war, lived on its brink. According to historian A. E. Afigbo, relationships among neighboring Cross River peoples that did not share common ancestry or the same tutelary spirit, “could be particularly unpredictable, swinging capriciously between uneasy peace and open warfare or blood feud.”²⁸⁷ It seems more likely that the distrust of others stems not from any innate proclivity to do so, but from the social pressures initiated by the transatlantic slave trade, when the demand for human cargo could never be satisfied and the local peoples battled themselves not only in trying to meet it, but to avoid it. They

²⁸⁷ A. E. Afigbo, “Trade and Politics on the Cross River, 1895-1905,” *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* 13, 1 (1972), 24; see also E. O. Erim, “Cross-Cultural Contacts Between the Efik and the Upper-Cross River Peoples 1600-1900 A. D.,” in eds. S. O. Jaja, E. O. Erim, and B. W. Andah, *Old Calabar Revisited* (Enugu: Harris Publishers, 1990), 169-185.

suffered great losses to the slavers—particularly in the case of hinterland peoples such as the Ejagham and Efut, as the Cuban graphic script called *anaforuana*, based largely on *nsibidi*, being a (literally) graphic testament to this fact.²⁸⁸

Consequently, if *nsibidi* served a unifying function in the past, a significant aspect of it must have been more standardized in order to facilitate the trade that tied this linguistically complex region together. The secrecy now surrounding *nsibidi*—at least as used by men’s groups such as the Leopard Societies—was exacerbated by colonialism. According to Kalu, after the arrival of Europeans who threatened local power—i.e. missionaries and later colonial officers—*nsibidi* “became a form a resistance,”²⁸⁹ and thus went underground to avoid official scrutiny. Concerning Calabar, which was the first and long-time capital of British colonial Southern Nigeria, one would understand just such a response from the Leopard Society that formerly wielded unchallenged power. As such, it was among the institutions most threatened by colonialism. This situation is comparable to that of the Yoruba Ogboni Society of Abeokuta during colonialism, which I have addressed elsewhere.²⁹⁰

While the Leopard Societies kept knowledge of *nsibidi* from outsiders, the more public aspects of *nsibidi* literacy—to use Carlson’s highly appropriate term—gradually became less popular with the rise of Western education and writing, Christian teaching, and the increasing availability of decorative imported objects in a variety of media. These factors led to a steep decline in the practice of decorating locally-made objects —

²⁸⁸ See Thompson, citing Lydia Cabrera, in *Flash of the Spirit*, 244-268.

²⁸⁹ Kalu, 85.

²⁹⁰ Christopher Slogar, “Carved Ogboni Figures from Abeokuta, Nigeria,” *African Arts* 35, 4 (2002):14-26, 91-92.

which was and remains the fort  of women (e.g. calabash pyrogravure, incised brassware, ceramics, wall decoration). This explains the current situation at Calabar: with the public-sphere demand for such *nsibidi* objects now but gone, *nsibidi* literacy remains largely with the men’s Leopard Societies.

Considering that graphic *nsibidi* is not standardized, I have not focused here much on the interpretations for particular signs that were gathered during the colonial period. They may well have been correct for that particular time and place, and certainly some were widely known in popular culture. However, due to the political situation of the time, I am not altogether convinced the colonial-era investigators were always given truthful information, especially in the context of the Leopard Societies, which continue to safeguard the full meanings of *nsibidi* from non-members. On the other hand, I am more inclined to believe Macgregor’s claim that women at times taught *nsibidi* in schools, or that the signs painted on young girls could “proclaim their life histories” because, as Carlson has demonstrated, women’s usage tended not to treat *nsibidi* as a secret, because women had different political agendas than men.

Beyond the problematics of translation, there remain unresolved questions in the literature about how to identify signs in particular settings: There is disagreement whether this or that sign is “true” *nsibidi*, or “pseudo-*nsibidi*,”²⁹¹ (whatever that might be), or (merely) “decoration.” I have decided here to simply use the terminology of the original source, because to me the important issue is the visual language—the signs themselves (which are widespread geographically as well as historically)—rather than

²⁹¹ See Campbell, “Nsibidi Update,” 33-46; Carlson, 202-219.

what they are called (which may not have been consistent geographically or historically for any number of reasons). The problem has been wrongly gendered, much like the way “art” in general used to be—i.e., in men’s contexts the signs are called *nsibidi* while in women’s they are downgraded as mere decoration.²⁹² Yet it is now clearer, thanks to Carlson’s study, that it is the very fluidity of meaning accorded to designs like *nsibidi*—not necessarily what they are called—that is the real gendered issue. Men and women can use a similar visual language in different ways for different reasons. Terminology can and does change—what is more interesting to me is under what circumstances does the underlying *meaning* change or remain constant. Was *nsibidi* more public, more widely understood, in the past among both men and women? The historical and archaeological record certainly indicates this was the case. Geometric designs were ubiquitous in Cross River societies, enhancing a broad spectrum of objects in both popular culture and private contexts: buildings, textiles, carvings, calabashes, ceramics, even individuals’ own bodies. They informed momentous occasions, signaled group identity and power, communicated private affections. Need they be parsed into *nsibidi*, pseudo-*nsibidi*, or decoration? Who decides? Ultimately, it is a false choice because these terms are restrictive according to who defines them. Thus, whatever they may have been called, the motifs on the Calabar terracottas evidently were significant in the contexts of their use. They also happen to be highly decorative. The two categories need not be mutually exclusive.

Moreover, the decoration of the terracottas offers new insight viz-a-viz *nsibidi* and its relationship to money and therefore, power. Consider that today the general

²⁹² As in Kalu.

nsibidi sign for a person is an arc, or more specifically, an arc with barred ends. This is widely understood as a manilla, the local currency prevalent during the early twentieth century when the first colonial investigators made their collections of *nsibidi* signs. Thus *nsibidi*, especially in the context of the Leopard Societies, as an explicit reminder of the economic status of its members and the larger group as a whole (Fig. I.7). In this light, it is interesting that one of the main motifs of the terracotta jars resembles another archaic form of currency (Fig. 4.117) and that the arcs seen on the old terracottas do *not* have barred ends. This seems to corroborate the terracottas' dating by suggesting they pre-date the adoption of manilla currency in the Cross River area. If so, then the adoption of the manilla-arc with barred ends into modern *nsibidi* was an innovation based on an extant practice of using signs to connote economic status. But were they called *nsibidi* then?

Another similarity with between the Calabar terracottas and modern *nsibidi* is the fact that, like the brass trays, *ukara* cloths, and pyroengraved calabashes, there can be a number of different motifs appearing together on a single object.

Oboto Okoho/Okang Mbang and Urban Calabar Terracottas: Major Differences

While many of the terracottas from the area of Oboto Okoho and Okang Mbang are similar to, and in some cases are even indistinguishable from, the finds made within Calabar, there are some notable differences that set the two areas apart. One, most obviously, is the dating. Okang Mbang seems to be later, according to the radiocarbon dates and privately-obtained TL results. Another concerns the relative amounts of the red and buff wares found in each area, with redware being much more common in Calabar (especially the Old Marian Road site), while buffware is more characteristic of the Oboto

Okoho/Okang Mbang area (for example, the type of redware headrest with complex open-work decoration as found at Old Marian Road and elsewhere in Calabar is particular that area, while at Obot Okoho/Okang Mbang, headrests are typically buffware with no such open-work decoration). In addition, the small bowls described here are much more prevalent outside Calabar. Iron artifacts, moreover, have been common within Calabar but were not found in the Obot Okoho/Okang Mbang area.

Perhaps the greatest distinction between the two areas, at least to this art historian, concerns the anthropomorphic figurines. Types I and II are so far exclusive to urban Calabar, while Types III and IV are overwhelmingly associated with the sites located outside the city. To me, this is further evidence in support of the later dating of Okang Mbang, considering that the figurines found there appear to combine the formal characteristics of the other two types found within Calabar (i.e. the distinct head and, at times, arms akimbo gesture of Type I and the decoration of the torso with discrete motifs set within clearly demarcated compositional panels as in Type II). This all suggests some physical migration of peoples from the Calabar area, or at least some sort of cultural dispersal through trade or other means.

A Benue Connection?

Considering again the migration histories of Cross River peoples and the question of who made the Calabar terracottas, an additional case has appeared periodically in the literature and I would like to comment upon it here, if only to make a confusing situation even more so. According to the historian E. O. Erim (following Meek), “. . . the Jukun civilization remained dominant in [the Benue-Cross] region until about the early years of

the sixteenth century after which the Jukun ancestors left [the] region for another homeland.”²⁹³ The Jukun kingdom was centered in the Benue River region north of the Cross River, with Wukari as one of its capitals. “That its citizens traded as far south as the port of Calabar within the modern Cross River State remains an open question,” Erim states, “Unfortunately, historians working on the pre-1600 history of Calabar have not sought to investigate the connection between Kwararafa [the Jukun kingdom] and that sea port.”²⁹⁴

Some of the Calabar terracottas suggest the issue is worth considering anew. In particular, the Type III figurines with abstract heads, with their very compact faces, characteristic placement of the mouth above flanged ears, and hemispherical headdress, they do indeed recall some sculpture from the Benue River region (Fig. 7.1, also 4.132, top left and top right). The pre-1600 dating is appropriate, and we know that Calabar was in contact with long distance trade routes that likely traversed the northern area, as indicated by the beads found at the Abasi Edem site and elsewhere, and the preponderance of motifs such as the interlace and weaving skeuomorphs, which are also common in Islamic iconography. Thus, it could be that Calabar had a significant Jukun/Benue influence in the distant past. The issue begs further investigation.

While the specific identities of the makers and users of the Calabar terracottas remain unknown, I have tried here to demonstrate the historical depth of an iconography and associated practices that are fundamental to many aspects of culture and which are

²⁹³ E.O. Erim, “Social and Political Developments in the Upper Cross River Region, 1600-1900,” in ed. Abasiattai, *A History of the Cross River Region of Nigeria*, 114.

²⁹⁴ E. O. Erim, *Idoma Nationality 1600-1900* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension, 1981), 16.

widely shared in the Cross River region today, including institutions such as the men's Leopard Society and women's "fattening house," certain masquerades, body decoration, and sacred practices related to honoring spirits and the dead. This iconography has deep historical roots, as the Calabar terracottas and carved monoliths make clear.

The terracottas offer detailed information not only about ceramic practices, but inform a broad spectrum of visual culture. The decoration of the anthropomorphic figurines implies that people decorated their own bodies in a similarly complex fashion. The weaving skeuomorphs suggests that basket- and textile-weaving were practiced at a sophisticated level. They offer numerous examples of symbols now called *nsibidi* and suggest that the women who created them had an intimate knowledge of and facility to combine them in novel ways—one could easily conclude that their *nsibidi* literacy was itself an art form. Indeed, the creativity of the Calabar ceramicists is remarkable, considering that with virtually every piece made, a new design was invented. Furthermore, the terracottas at least suggest that many of cultural institutions and practices associated with *nsibidi* today are significantly older than previously considered. This is not to say they have been static, however. Over time, certain designs no doubt fell into and out of favor. And the very fact that the practices associated with these designs are so widespread, in addition to the fact that European goods were readily incorporated into the associated ceremonials, illustrates that the peoples of the Cross River region have long been receptive to new ideas and new art forms. Although many questions about the Calabar terracottas remain to be answered, we are now better able to understand and appreciate the historical depth and artistic vitality of visual culture in the Cross River region.

APPENDIX

*POLYPHEMUS AFRICANUS AND THE IDEA OF CALABAR: CONSTRUCTIONS OF CROSS RIVER HISTORY, CA. 1500-1985*²⁹⁵

. . . of course they are cannibals; they are all cannibals, are natives down here when they get the chance.

Mary Kingsley, quoting her guide, an “old Coaster,” in *West African Studies* (1899)²⁹⁶

To fully appreciate the significance of the new archaeological discoveries from the Calabar area, and how they bear upon the history of the wider Cross River region, it is important to have some understanding of the production of knowledge about the area and how it developed historically. Until fairly recently, those whose records form the basis of our current understanding of this region’s history were often engaged in certain kinds of activities (e.g. trade, colonial administration, missionary work), which at times significantly effected their understanding of the events around them, what they chose to record, and how they chose to record it. While some observations were noted fairly objectively—i.e. without undue value judgement on the part of the observer—others were taken within a context of harsh criticism stemming from a combination of assumed moral superiority and a basic misunderstanding of local events and traditions. And so it often suited European interests to consign African history to oblivion in order to effect change—and by that I mean gain power—in the present.

²⁹⁵ Papers related to this appendix were read at the 33rd Middle Atlantic Symposium in the History of Art, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC (April 5, 2003) and the 45th Meeting of the Society of the History of Discoveries, Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, WY (September 10, 2004).

²⁹⁶ Mary Kingsley, *West African Studies* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1899), 42.

Hence, the production of knowledge about the Cross River region, especially the few decades preceding and then following formal colonization after the Berlin Conference of 1883-1884, was strongly influenced by a European agenda of conquest. Not surprisingly, this agenda was particularly well served by the trope of cannibalism. This chapter examines how the trope of cannibalism affected the Cross River region beginning with the early period of Portuguese exploration along the West African coast at the turn of the sixteenth century. I will make use of a variety of Western sources, including maps, popular books, newspaper articles, and the accounts of traders, missionaries, and colonial officials, in order to reveal the predominant Western attitude toward the peoples and culture of the Cross River region. I do so to demonstrate the false history applied to this place and the interminably long period during which it stood, unquestioned. It is this history that makes the ancient terracottas even more significant, because they evidence the history others chose not to recognize.

Many writers have addressed the issue of negative Western images of Africa as they concern the continent generally²⁹⁷ and so when I began this project I wondered whether it was truly necessary to devote so much space to it. Certainly the issue can be considered a local manifestation of the widespread fascination with cannibalism in the Western world, a result of the largely unquestioned ethnocentrism that fueled the slave

²⁹⁷ See, for example, Katherine George, "The Civilized West Looks at Primitive Africa: 1400-1800," *Isis* 49 (1958), 62-72; Dorothy Hammond and Alta Jablow, *The Myth of Africa* (New York: The Library of Social Science, 1977); Ekpo Eyo, "Primitivism and Other Misconceptions in African Art," *Munger Africana Library Notes* 63 (1982), 3-27; Patrick Brantlinger, "Victorians and Africans: The Genealogy of the Myth of the Dark Continent," *Critical Inquiry* 12 (Autumn 1985), 166-203 (on cannibalism, 184); Gustav Jahoda, *Images of Savages: Ancient roots of modern prejudice in western culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), in particular, ch. 8, "Cannibalism at issue," and ch. 9, "The fascinating horror;" A. Buluda Itandala, "European Images of African from Early Times to the Eighteenth Century," in Daniel Mengara (ed.), *Images of Africa: Stereotypes and Realities* (Trenton and Asmara: African World Press, 2001), 61-81.

trade and later colonization of Africa. As an art historian focusing on southern Nigeria, however, I became interested in the historical depth and specificity of the charges leveled against Cross River peoples in the various sources I encountered during research, because such commentary inevitably colored what was said (or not) about their art. For example, the celebrated Mary Kingsley derisively quipped in 1897, “Unless under white direction, the African has never made an even fourteenth-rate piece of cloth or pottery, or a machine, tool, picture, sculpture, and that he has never even risen to the level of picture writing.”²⁹⁸ Considering her rejection of the more commonly used *second-*, *third-*, or even *fourth-*rate qualifiers as being too complimentary, one wonders how much this prolific writer could have taught us had she carried even a slightly higher opinion of African creativity. Yet by no means was Kingsley alone in her disparagement. Among others, the Reverend William Dickie, remarking on the “Calabarese people” in 1894 observed, “Their carving and pottery were of a very rude description, but the women were somewhat adept in decoration.”²⁹⁹

In such a climate, perhaps, allegations of cannibalism might be inevitable. But the reasons why the Cross River region was subject to such repeated and insistent rumor-mongering about cannibalism could not have been so simple. While the charges against them, as with Africans elsewhere, were often blanket statements condemning entire ethnic groups or regions, as time went on the charges became more specific (though to be sure, they remained firmly within the realm of hearsay, or in some cases, misinformation,

²⁹⁸ Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa* (1897, reprint London: Frank Cass, 1965), 670.

²⁹⁹ William Dickie, *The Story of the Mission in Old Calabar* (Edinburgh: Foreign Mission Office, 1894), 60.

as I argue below). It was as if the earlier blanket statements had been accepted *a priori* as matter-of-fact truths, so that when appropriate cases arose during the colonial period (such as a suspicious killing, for example), cannibals were held responsible because it was assumed they existed—*right here*. The situation may well have been exacerbated by the European discovery of the sculpture produced in the area, which could be intimidating to Western eyes. For instance, at the Ejagham village of Oburekkpe, the British colonial officer P. A. Talbot uncharacteristically noted in his book, *In the Shadow of the Bush* (1912), that “The people all had the filed teeth and thin shrunken appearance usually associated with cannibal rites. . . .”³⁰⁰ Two paragraphs later, he noticed “several ancient carved wooden heads of an unusual type, covered with human skin.”³⁰¹ These were examples of the now famous skin-covered headdresses that are unique to the Cross River area and which we know were typically covered with antelope skin—yet Talbot (among others) assumed otherwise.³⁰² He then elaborated, “On one occasion, an old war dance was given in our honour. At the present day, mercifully, only wooden masks covered with skin are used, in lieu of the freshly killed heads of enemies formerly borne by the victors.”³⁰³ Such statements gave birth to the idea among Europeans that the art made by Cross River peoples proved their cannibalism, i.e. carved heads = “trophy heads” = headhunters = cannibals. Even William Bascom uncritically repeated the trope:

³⁰⁰ P. A. Talbot, *In the Shadow of the Bush*, 260.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 261.

³⁰² On the issue of the possible usage of human skin on these objects, see Keith Nicklin, “Nigerian Skin-Covered Masks,” *African Arts* 7, 3 (1974), 8. On other kinds of animal skin so used, see Keith Nicklin and Jill Salmons, “Ikem: The History of a Masquerade in Southeast Nigeria,” in ed. Sidney Kasfir, *West African Masks and Cultural Systems* (Tervuren: Musée Royale de l’Afrique Centrale, 1988), 143.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*

“Carved headpieces covered with antelope hide—and allegedly human skin in earlier times—were worn in the war dances of *Ogirinia*, a “head-hunting” or war association.”³⁰⁴

Upon realizing the complexity of this local history involving the cannibal theme, I decided it merited a fuller treatment here. However, it is not in my agenda to paint the African past in rosy hues—as in human history generally, there were certainly events in the African past that were cruel, even deadly. The ritual sacrifice of house servants and slaves after the death of an Efik noble, and the ritual killing of twins, are two particularly horrific but well-documented examples from the Calabar region in the nineteenth century. But unfortunately, because of such localized and, in any case, uncommon events, entire cultures were unfairly denigrated in Western sources and popular media, based on the actions of a few and which in any case rarely happened.

Early European Perceptions of Africa and Calabar

The stereotypes that came to be identified with Africans during the slave trade and the later colonial period were not necessarily foremost in the minds of Europeans during their early meetings with Africans. In the early contact period prior to 1700, Europeans sometimes treated their African hosts as equals and remarked positively on their culture, such as the neat appearance of their towns, the manner in which they conducted their affairs, and the skill evident in their handicrafts. For example, Olfert Dapper’s well-known (albeit second-hand) description of Benin, published in 1668, includes the following account:

³⁰⁴ William Bascom, *African Art in Cultural Perspective* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1974), 109. See also Werner Gillon, *A Short History of African Art* (London: Penguin Books, 1984), 182, “Some of the older masks may have been covered with human skin . . .”

The King's court . . . is easily as big as the town of Haarlem . . . [and] divided into many fine palaces, houses and rooms for courtiers, and it contains beautiful long square galleries . . . covered from top to bottom with cast copper, on which deeds of war and battle scenes are carved. These are kept very clean. Most of the palaces and royal houses in the court are covered with palm leaves instead of shingles, and each is adorned with a turret tapering to a point, upon which are skillfully wrought copper birds, very life-like, spreading their wings The land is well populated, especially with nobility. The inhabitants are a well-mannered people, who surpass the other Blacks of this coast in everything. They live harmoniously together under good laws, and show great respect to the Dutch and other foreigners who come to trade, as well as to anyone else.³⁰⁵

Adam Jones, in his study of this account, draws attention to the general lack of negative commentary found in it. "Indeed, the main asset of Dapper's account," according to Jones, "lies in the fact that he and his informants did not really have an axe to grind. They had no need to justify the slave trade or colonial conquest, since neither were being contemplated; nor were they interested in spreading Christianity."³⁰⁶

The European merchant-sailors were so impressed with African artistic creativity that they purchased dozens of intricately carved ivory sculptures along the coasts of modern-day Sierra Leone, Nigeria, and Congo. They are frequently modeled after European forms, such as hunting horns and saltcellars, and were routinely presented as gifts to the mariners' royal patrons, including for example, Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain (Figs. A.1-A.2).³⁰⁷ By 1521, even the artist Albrecht Dürer had purchased two

³⁰⁵ Ed. Adam Jones, *Olfert Dapper's Description of Benin (1668)* (Madison: African Studies Program, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1998), 11, 13.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁰⁷ Susan Vogel, "Introduction: African and the Renaissance," in Ezio Bassani (ed.) *Africa and the Renaissance: Art in Ivory* (NY: The Center for African Art, 1988), 13. The horn was presented to them upon the marriage of their daughter to Manuel I, King of Portugal. It bore the arms of Castile, Aragon, and Portugal.

African saltcellars in the Netherlands.³⁰⁸ Most of these Afro-Portuguese ivories, as William Fagg called them,³⁰⁹ contain an interesting mixture of European and African iconography, including hunting scenes and royal coats-of-arms alongside figures carved in local African styles. No saltcellars are known to have come from the Cross River region, but there are a number of ivory horns decorated with local motifs that almost certainly did. They also entered various European “curiosity cabinets” early on, as described previously in Chapter Five.

African textiles, particularly those created among the Kongo peoples of Central Africa, were also widely admired by early modern Europeans. The Portuguese chronicler Pacheco Pereira, writing ca. 1505, remarked, “. . . in the kingdom of the Congo they produce cloths from palm fibres with velvet-like pile of such beauty that better ones are not made in Italy.”³¹⁰ In 1664, Paolo Maria Terzagio catalogued two Kongo cloths in the famed collection of Manfredo Settala in Milan, praising the works as, “. . . great art that surpasses our silk weaves.”³¹¹

Art historian Susan Vogel suggests that such willingness to appreciate African artworks stems from the idea that Renaissance Europeans and Africans “did not perceive each other as fundamentally different.”³¹² This is because Europe at that time had much

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

³⁰⁹ See William Fagg, *Afro-Portuguese Ivories* (London: Batchworth Press, 1959).

³¹⁰ See Ezio Bassani, *African Art and Artefacts in European Collections 1400-1800* (London: British Museum Press), xxxii.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*

³¹² Susan Vogel, “Africa and the Renaissance: Art in Ivory (Exhibition Preview),” *African Arts* 22,2 (1989), 89. See also Peter Mark, “European Perceptions of Black Africans in the Renaissance,” in Ezio Bassani and William Fagg, 21-31.

in common with Africa: society based on the extended family; daily life governed by a religion in which sacred images were considered powerful and capable of affecting daily affairs (with witchcraft a not uncommon threat); craft training based on apprenticeship, which encouraged a common workshop style rather than individualism; and craft production based on commission and traditional iconography. In many ways Europe and Africa also shared similar levels of technology, evidenced in such mundane sights as unpaved roads, thatched-roof houses, and earthenware pottery—which to European sailors would have been more familiar than the extravagant palaces and fancy plate of the ruling class.³¹³ Furthermore, the African kingdoms that became the focus of the early transatlantic trade, such as Asante, Benin, and Congo—with their god-like rulers, intricate court etiquette, militaristic outlook, and social stratification of nobles and commoners, rich and poor—were structurally equivalent to many contemporary European systems of government. Finally, the systems of elite art patronage then in place in the kingdoms of Africa and Europe were not dissimilar in their preference for expensive materials and carefully constructed imagery, which valorized the ruling class and its ideology. Thus, on both continents there are long histories of art serving as state propaganda.³¹⁴

Meanwhile, it is conceivable that upon first contact, some Africans viewed the newly-arrived Europeans as a kind of vindication of their cosmological beliefs. Suzanne Preston Blier illustrated how African religions from the areas in which early contact took

³¹³ Vogel, “Africa and the Renaissance: Art in Ivory (Exhibition Preview),” 89.

³¹⁴ On Benin, see Ben-Amos, Paula Girshick, *Art, Innovation, and Politics in Eighteenth-Century Benin* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999).

place (for example, the Benin and Kongo kingdoms) could accommodate such a reaction.³¹⁵ In these coastal areas, the color white is associated with spiritual purity, death, and the afterworld. The afterworld, moreover, is conceived of as a watery realm. Consider then the first contact of coastal Africans with the pale-skinned Europeans who traveled across the ocean and displayed the great wealth and power that might be expected of representatives of the afterworld. This complex relationship is made explicit in the corpus of Benin art, in which may be found images of Portuguese visitors juxtaposed with images of mudfish, the avatars of Olokun who is the god of wealth and whose abode is the sea.³¹⁶ Moreover, the Europeans often bore symbols that were readily identifiable by these Africans, such as the cross, which is considered a spiritually potent device quite distinct from its Christian connotation. For example, in Benin the cruciform is associated with Olokun; among Kongo peoples, it serves as a cosmogram signifying the unification of the spiritual and earthly realms.³¹⁷

But the early cordiality between Europeans and Africans would not last. The new colonies in the Americas required more labor than indigenous populations could provide, with so many native peoples succumbing to war and imported European diseases. After 1600, as plantation owners in the Americas found workers harder and harder to come by, commerce in Africa—as well as European attitudes about Africans—shifted

³¹⁵ Suzanne Preston Blier, “Imaging Otherness in Ivory: African Portrayals of the Portuguese ca. 1492,” *The Art Bulletin* 75, 3 (1993), 375-396.

³¹⁶ See, for example, Kate Ezra, *Royal Art of Benin: The Perls Collection* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992), cat. nos. 77, 78, 119.

³¹⁷ Blier, “Imaging Otherness in Ivory: African Portrayals of the Portuguese ca. 1492,” 380; Paula Girshick Ben-Amos, *The Art of Benin* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), 40-41; Robert Farris Thompson and Joseph Cornet, *The Four Moments of the Sun* (Washington, D.C.: The National Gallery of Art, 1981), 43-52.

accordingly.³¹⁸ Along the West African coast, for example, the Dutch West India Company, formed in 1621 and which initially sought primarily gold and ivory, began to purchase human slaves in great numbers in the late 1630s after the Dutch wrested control of Portuguese colonies in Brazil.³¹⁹ Thus, in order to justify the actions necessary to institute a transatlantic trade in African people rather than goods alone, European perceptions of Africans had to shift accordingly. It was then that the image of the African was imbued with a wholly new significance. In fact, their very status as human beings would be called into question.

Of course, negative tropes about Africans had existed since the Classical era (e.g. the Saharan “wild men” of Herodotus and Diodorus’ comments that certain Ethiopians were “entirely savage and display the nature of a wild beast”).³²⁰ Such comments later inspired the images of monstrous races seen in medieval and Renaissance sources.³²¹ They were of course born of ignorance and fear in order to separate the civilized “us” from the primitive “them” during a time when no real interaction between Europe and sub-Saharan Africa existed. However, from the early sixteenth century on, such images were treated rather differently. In fact, they were put to work, politicized, to justify the

³¹⁸ See Peter Mark, “European Perceptions of Black Africans in the Renaissance,” 30.

³¹⁹ See Adam Jones, *West Africa in the Mid-Seventeenth Century: An Anonymous Dutch Manuscript* (African Studies Association Press, 1995), 1.

³²⁰ George, 63. Herodotus, *The History*, Bk. II, Ch. 191; Diodorus Siculus [Works] Bk. III, Ch. 8.

³²¹ For example, see the image of “Ethiopia” with dragons in *Les secrets de l’histoire naturelle contenant les merveilles et choses memorables du monde*, fol. 20r (French, ca. 1480), Paris, Bibliotheque nationale; *Miroir Historiale*, images by Vincent de Beauvais in trans. Jean de Vignay (French, 14th c.), Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum.

slave trade and later colonizing of Africa.³²² The trope became entrenched in European and American popular culture and to some extent it still is.³²³

Early Sources for Cannibals in the Cross River Region

This history, at least as it involves Nigeria, may begin with one of the earliest chroniclers of its coastline, Pacheco Pereira, mentioned above. His manuscript, *Esmeraldo de Situ Orbis* of ca. 1505 was in its day the most current source on West Africa, benefiting as it did from recent discoveries by Portuguese pilots. Pereira's original text is lost, but two later copies survive.³²⁴ In these, Pereira is clear that at the time of his writing, Portuguese traders were already buying slaves from the Benin Kingdom and along the coast facing Mt. Cameroon, which are respectively west and east of the Cross River. Yet, even though the *Rio da cruz*, or Cross River, appears in other Portuguese sources by 1514, Pereira makes no mention of it, or the adjacent Rio del Rey (now part of Cameroon), at all—although he is elsewhere careful to describe much smaller waterways. It also does not help that the author's maps and sketches, referred to in the text, have been lost.

³²² For example, Herbert Ward, *Five Years with the Congo Cannibals* (NY, 1890).

³²³ Mel Lastman, former mayor of Toronto, was quoted in 2001: "[Why] the hell would I want to go to a place like Mombasa? . . . I just see myself in a pot of boiling water with all these natives dancing around me." See Jim Byers, "Olympic costs bound to increase," *The Toronto Star*, 20 June 2001, Sports, 9. The quote reflects the mayor's feelings regarding a possible trip to Mombasa, Kenya, to lobby for Toronto's bid as a venue for the 2008 Olympics. An American example, seen by millions, was Fox Television's "October Magic" advertising campaign for the 2002 Major League Baseball World Series, which made frequent and disturbing use of an actor in the guise of a "native witchdoctor."

³²⁴ See ed. George Kimble, *Esmeraldo de Situ Orbis By Duarte Pacheco Pereira* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1937; reprint, Nendeln: Kraus, 1967), xxxi.

Esmeraldo, like other early European sources, displays a certain ambivalence toward Africans. For instance, when Pereira remarks that the way of life of the people of Benin—his trading partners—is “full of abuses and witchcraft and idolatry,” it was their actions he was judging, not their inherent status as human beings. Accusations of witchcraft, moreover, were not unheard of in Europe at that time.³²⁵ His praise of Kongo textiles has already been noted. But Pereira took a very different approach when describing peoples with whom Portugal had *not* established trade—in other words, people not well known—who lived in-between, or in the hinterlands, of their entrepôts. They included the people neighboring Benin in the Niger Delta and those on the coast below Mt. Cameroon, whom Pereira repeatedly calls “cannibals.”

This ambivalence has much to do with the fact that Europeans in Africa preferred to do business with highly organized polities such as the Benin and Kongo kingdoms. Not only were such polities already familiar in structure, the vast markets and resources they controlled were accessible through just a few individuals (i.e. the king and his advisors). Hence, the decentralized communities located between them remained outside the European realm of knowledge, yet it was from such groups that many enslaved Africans originated. So perhaps due to simple xenophobia, or to keep other Europeans from threatening the Portuguese monopoly, or even to disparage those who would be slaves, Pereira employed rumors to make these people appear as unattractive as possible. And what better way to do it than to say they’d developed a taste for human flesh?³²⁶

³²⁵ See also Peter Mark, “European Perceptions of Black Africans in the Renaissance,” in Ezio Bassani and William Fagg, 21-31.

³²⁶ See J. D. Fage, “A Commentary on Duarte Pacheco Pereira’s Account of the Lower Guinea Coastlands in His *Esmeraldo de Situ Orbis*, and on Some Other Early Accounts,” *History in Africa* 7(1980), 64, 69, 70.

In 1540, the German geographer Sebastian Münster published a map of Africa based on the work of Ptolemy as well as Portuguese and Arabic sources (Fig. A.3). The map reached a large audience for it was included in Münster's enormously popular atlas, *Cosmographia*, first published in 1544 and then expanded and reissued many times until 1650.³²⁷ As depicted, the African continent (labeled "Aethiopia") includes imagery of such ubiquitous African wildlife as parrots and an elephant, yet the only figure is a lone example of the race labeled "Monoculi," sitting on the northernmost shore of the Bight of Biafra where the Cross River is located (Fig. A.4). Exactly why Münster chose this particular image, and placed it where he did, is not known. But I do not think it was purely out of fancy. First, he had obviously heard news of Africa—his depiction of the tree with a flock of parrots and the elephant tell us that much. Second, his three images of living creatures (monoculus, parrots, elephant) are not placed randomly throughout the continent but are grouped together along the West African coast precisely where so many important discoveries had recently been made. So Münster was making an effort to present up-to-date information. Third, besides the one monoculus, there are no other mythical creatures, such as dragons or sea monsters, which were elsewhere commonly found on mappamundi. Why then choose a simple one-eyed man when Pliny offered so many more colorful alternatives (e.g. the Cynocephali, a dog-headed race)?

The answer, I suggest, is that Münster was very clever in his use of symbolism and chose the creature for a specific reason. Consider that the most famous monoculus in

³²⁷ *Cosmographia* appeared in twenty-seven German editions, as well as eight in Latin, four in English, three each in French and Italian, and one in Czech. See Leo Bagrow and R. A. Skelton, *History of Cartography* (Chicago: Precedent Publishing, 1985), 151-152.

all of Western literature happens to be Polyphemus—the mythical Cyclops from Homer’s *Odyssey*—but more to the point, Polyphemus liked to eat people. “May I behold Polyphemus again,” Ovid’s Achaemenides exclaims, “and that gaping mouth of his, streaming with human blood . . .”³²⁸ Note too, from John Mandeville’s wildly successful *Travels*, the one-eyed giant who ate “raw flesh” and lived in a kingdom where “the father ate his son and the son his father.”³²⁹ Hence Münster, having likely heard or seen reports about cannibals in the Bights (perhaps the same reports that spoke of parrots), employed a figure eminently recognizable from both classical mythology and current popular literature to indicate that a race of man-eaters occupied the west coast of Africa. It would have been an erudite display worthy of the acclaim of his peers. In any case, regardless of the specific sources he may or may not have consulted for inspiration, his monocus would be viewed as a man-eating Cyclops by any learned viewer who saw it—there simply is no other figure in Western literature who compares. Thus inspired by Homer’s famed example, I call Münster’s African variant *Polyphemus africanus*. The Cross River region, it turns out, was one of his favorite haunts.

He appears prominently in the earliest known English-language report about the Old Calabar region, dating from 1672 and the publication of the story about John Watts, a crewman from the London slave vessel *Peach-tree*.³³⁰ After having procured the ship’s

³²⁸ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Mary Innes (London: Penguin Books, 1955), 315.

³²⁹ John Mandeville’s *Travels* first appeared in the mid-14th century and by 1500, was translated into all major European languages. See trans. C. W. Mosely, *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1983), 9–10. See also the discussion of cannibal monocoli in the 14th-century *Itinierary* of John of Hese, in John Block Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 143.

³³⁰ Watts, *A True Relation* . . .

requisite cargo, we are told, the eighteen-year-old sailor was sent ashore with three shipmates under orders to sell their leftover stock of copper bars, a local currency. During their approach to shore, Watts claimed, the party was attacked by natives and taken hostage. Within the following month, not only were his three companions killed, we are told they were broiled and eaten by their captors. Somehow, Watts managed to spare himself and survived amongst the natives until he could find passage home. After making his way back to England months later, the young slave-trader recounted the incredible story of his escape from what he called, without apparent irony, “so cruel a bondage.”

There are some questionable aspects to this report, which merit discussion here as they relate to the alleged cannibalism. Not least is the fact that Richard Watts (the notary) claims to relate “*verbatim*. . . from the sufferers own mouth,”³³¹ the story of his sailor nephew, who may well have been illiterate. The account as published was certainly improved by Richard, but to what extent?

Here I must question the very nature of John Watts’ excursion. The account states that the crew of the *Peach-tree* had already “taken their Negroes” and was “ready to sail, their Anchor being a peek” (p. 3).³³² The boatswain, who led the party, wanted to bring along firearms because he did not believe reports that the natives “were a harmless, and innocent people” (p. 4). So evidently their intended business partners for this mission were not the same people from whom they obtained the slaves, assuming they traded through middlemen. (Of course, if they worked independently as slave raiders, it

³³¹ Watts, 3.

³³² A peek, i.e. *apeak*—raised to a vertical position before lifting.

would certainly account for some local hostility.) Moreover, it seems the group *expected* a fight, because after telling us their match (used to set off muskets) was extinguished after falling into the water, they were “not willing to precipitate their own ruine” (p. 4) by having no way to shoot and so they sent John Watts to shore *alone* to find a house to relight the dead match (!).

Why would the master of this already-full vessel, at very nearly the last moment before hoisting anchor and leaving, send a small armed party in a rowboat to “sell” a few more copper bars to some unknown natives? Why would he put his men at such risk? And why would the captain send underlings to do his trading work? Were they, perhaps, intentionally sent among hostile natives as punishment for some wrongdoing? This all seems very suspicious and I wonder whether the cannibalism aspect of this story was fabricated by John or Richard Watts to divert attention from some other embarrassing situation.

These early European sources, as we have seen, could be very ambivalent about the nature of Africans. Recall Dapper’s 1668 account of Benin, which describes the city and its residents in generally glowing terms. But when Dapper mentions the people living on the outskirts of the kingdom, he flatly states they are cannibals.³³³ Likewise, the late seventeenth-century *Description of Africa* by Jean Barbot describes the people of the “Old Calabar river” (meaning the Cross River) as being “good civiliz’d people,” while his brother James, in the same volume, is less kind in his references to some peoples of

³³³ Dapper 1668, *Naukeurige beschrijvinge der afrikaensche gewesten* (second ed., Amsterdam, 1676), quoted in Thomas Hodgkin, *Nigerian Perspectives: An Historical Anthology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 175.

the Niger Delta, whom he considers “beasts.”³³⁴ In his book published in 1734, the former slave trader William Snelgrave described the people of Old Calabar as “fierce brutish Cannibals.”³³⁵

Another slave trader by the name of Mr. Grant, in his account published in 1830, remarks on the cannibalistic proclivities of the chief and people of Tom Shott [Salt] Island, located near the mouth of the Cross River. He states that formerly they people would “seize, kill, roast and devour all the whites” they could find.³³⁶ Yet, Henry Nicholls, in a letter sent to the African Association in London in 1805, notes the same island, “. . . was governed by a chief who bears the same name [Tom Salt], which he many years ago obtained by making salt, their only article of trade, having no communication with white men, and having no disposition to sell slaves.”³³⁷ According to Nicholl’s report, moreover, this chief “[holds] in abhorrence the selling of slaves . . .”³³⁸ Thus, Grant’s malicious comments cannot be taken seriously. More likely, the people of Tom Shott wanted to be left alone, and being unwilling to sell their neighbors to Grant, may even have rebuked his proposal forcefully. Grant, having lost an opportunity to profit, would have had good reason to malign them in print.

³³⁴ Eds. Hair, Jones, and Law, vol. II, 677, 694, 700.

³³⁵ William Snelgrave, *A New Account of Some Parts of Guinea and the Slave-Trade* (London, 1734; reprint London: Frank Cass, 1971), 8.

³³⁶ Simmons (ed.), *Grant’s Sketch of Calabar*, 1. The text must refer to his activities in the Calabar area in the years prior to 1807, when the British outlawed the slave trade.

³³⁷ Ed. Robin Hallett, *Records of the African Association* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons 1964), 197.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*

The arrival of missionaries

The arrival of missionaries to the Calabar area was, from the beginning, bound inextricably with British government efforts to gain influence among the locals that would benefit trade. The Scottish Presbyterian Mission was first, establishing its mission in 1846. This action was facilitated by John Beecroft, a widely influential British agent who had served with distinction as Acting Governor of Fernando Po (the island off the Cameroonian coast) the two years prior to 1833 when the British abandoned it to the Spanish government. He then stayed on, offering counsel to any visiting Europeans and serving as de facto governor until 1841. Beecroft later accepted various jobs with the British navy, to mediate with native leaders the sometimes damaging effects of what was literally “gun-boat diplomacy.”³³⁹ In 1849, he was named Her Britannic Majesty’s Consul for the Bights of Benin and Biafra, which included all of southern Nigeria as well as the Kingdom of Dahomey. The power he accumulated was maintained by his successors and would be legalized at the Berlin Conference. According to historian K. O. Dike, it was Beecroft who “laid the foundations of British power in Nigeria.”³⁴⁰ One of Beecroft’s major contributions was in promoting missionary enterprise there.

Early in April of 1846, the Reverend Hope Waddell of the Scottish Presbytery was greeted by Beecroft at Fernando Po; soon thereafter, Waddell’s party arrived at Duke

³³⁹ See K. O. Dike, “John Beecroft, 1790-1854: Her Britannic Majesty’s Consul to the Bights of Benin and Biafra,” *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* I, 1 (December 1956), 12-13.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

Town, Calabar.³⁴¹ Waddell worked in the area for a number of years and came to be very highly regarded. Today, the most prestigious secondary school in Calabar is named in his honor, and Waddell's continued fame is ensured in part because he published his memoirs. His 1863 volume, *Twenty-nine Years in the West Indies and Central Africa*, contains valuable observations on Calabar and the surrounding region, which I will return in Chapter Five. Here, I only note the map of the lower Cross River region included with the book (Figs. A.5-A.6). Near its northernmost edge, one finds a reference to the "Ekoi People" (who are now more properly known as the Ejagham). It states they are "cannibals." No other ethnic group on the map is commented upon negatively, if at all.

Colonialism

After the transatlantic slave trade was banned, European interests in Africa sought increased supplies of raw goods (including ivory, timber, rubber, pepper, and palm oil), to fill the economic gap. The natural wealth of Africa led to more and deeper European involvement, culminating in the Western powers' "Scramble for Africa," the ensuing "spheres of influence," and finally outright colonization legalized at the 1884-1885 Berlin Conference. These occurred simultaneously with Christian missionary efforts to build churches, schools, and hospitals for the ultimate goal of converting and "civilizing" the natives. The writings of these colonial administrators and missionaries routinely denigrated African peoples and their cultural practices, which by European logic could only be improved through the European intervention. In southeastern Nigeria, this eventually came to violent punitive missions, such as the Aro Expedition, which was

³⁴¹ See McFarlan, *Calabar*, 13.

undertaken to persuade local communities to recognize British governmental authority and thus allow unrestricted free trade. Goods at that time had to be passed through each of the major ethnic groups—Akunakuna, Aro, Umon, Enyong, Efik—who competed with each other for control of various segments of the Cross River and adjacent lands.³⁴²

Traders from one ethnic group did not allow traders from another to pass through their territory, thus merchandise had to change hands from group to group as it went down the river toward Calabar. This caused local prices to rise and British profits to fall. As the historian Kannan Nair has commented on this period, “The predominant concern of the British government in the decades following the 1880s was substantially to increase the volume and value of British trade in West Africa.”³⁴³ To this end, the Oil Rivers Protectorate was established in 1885. The name itself, referring as it does to the lucrative palm oil trade, leaves no doubt about what it was, precisely, that the British sought to protect.

British parleys with African leaders to further this goal were hampered by the region’s diffuse political environment. Unlike the centralized societies found in other parts of the country (such as the Yoruba kingdoms in the southwest and the Hausas emirates in the north), the Cross River region was home to many staunchly independent villages that recognized no paramount ruler. Consequently, lengthy negotiations had to be undertaken on a village-by-village basis. By 1890 the British, losing patience with

³⁴² See A. E . Afigbo, “Trade and Politics on the Cross River, 1895-1905,” *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* 13, 1 (1972), 21-49 and Erim, “Cross-Cultural Contacts Between the Efik and the Upper-Cross River Peoples 1600-1900 A. D.,” 169-185.

³⁴³ Nair, 236.

this mode of diplomacy, resolved to take stronger measures upon concluding that “pacification” would require “not the Bible, but the sword.”³⁴⁴ Some towns, such as Ekuri, resisted forcefully but their antiquated weaponry was no match for British repeaters and artillery. Some villages, such as Ekuri, countered forcefully, but their antiquated weaponry was no match for British repeaters and artillery. Ekuri, torched in 1898,³⁴⁵ was one of many villages that met terrible consequences for resisting British imperialism.

During this time, sightings of *Polyphemus africanus* grew rampant. An 1884 *New York Times* story quotes Thomas Hutchinson (the former British Consul for the Bight of Biafra), who stated, “In 1859, human flesh was exposed as butcher’s meat in the market at Duke Town, Old Calabar.”³⁴⁶ What Hutchinson saw was in all likelihood the local hunters’ catch of the day, still widely known as “bush meat,” which could have included any of several large primate species (none human) whose parts could be easily mistaken for “human flesh.”

A major figure in the colonization of Nigeria at this time was Harold H. Johnston, who in 1887 was appointed Her Majesty’s Acting Consul for the recently-created Niger Coast Protectorate. The next year, Johnston was denied entry into the Atam region north of Ikom on the Upper Cross River. Thereafter he referred to those people in his writings

³⁴⁴ British Foreign Office correspondence from Consul Annesley to Lord Salisbury, 29 Oct. 1890. Quoted in E. A. Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria 1842-1914* (New York: Humanities Press, 1967), 13.

³⁴⁵ A. F. Mockler-Ferryman, *British West Africa: Its Rise and Progress* (London: Swann, Sonnenschein, and Company: 1900), 309.

³⁴⁶ “Cannibalism,” *The New York Times*, 26 October 1884, 12.

as “inveterate cannibals” on more than one occasion.³⁴⁷

In 1889, Johnson’s strange article, “Chances for the Increase of Cannibalism,” appeared in *The New York Times*.³⁴⁸ He alleges still more “African anthropophagy” in the upper Cross River area, recalling a visit to an unnamed village. There he parlayed among people who “craved for human flesh,” the evidence of which he describes as a “smoke-dried human leg, hanging from the rafters of the chief’s hut . . . which swayed to and fro over the smoking brands on the clay hearth.”³⁴⁹ Now, besides the more likely proposition that this leg belonged to some other primate (i.e. bush meat), and assuming the story was not fabricated altogether, we are still in need of evidence that such a relic was indeed meant to be food. (Perhaps having realized this point, when Johnston mentioned the story again in his 1923 biography, he changed “human leg” to the more colorful “human ham,” which leaves no doubt about its intended use³⁵⁰). Johnson continued his *New York Times* piece with an unexpectedly chilling and graphic account implicating most of southeastern Nigeria that would not be out of place in a modern horror script:

Lower down the Cross River, in the district of Enyon . . . about the most cold-blooded cannibalism is purported to exist which I have ever heard of. Youths are purchased at the interior slave markets and are dealt with as we deal with the young sheep and oxen which we turn into wethers and bullocks—are deliberately unsexed so that they may fatten quicker, and

³⁴⁷ Rosemary Harris, *The Political Organization of the Mbembe, Nigeria* (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1965), 203.

³⁴⁸ Henry H. Johnson, “Chances for the Increase of Cannibalism,” *The New York Times*, 3 February 1889, 12. This piece was extracted from Johnson’s longer essay, “The Ethics of Cannibalism,” published in the *Fortnightly Review* n.s. 45 (1 January 1889), 18-28.

³⁴⁹ Johnson, “Chances for the Increase of Cannibalism,” 12.

³⁵⁰ Henry H. Johnston, *The Story of My Life* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1923), 208.

are then fed upon yams and nourishing food till they are ready for the feast. Horrible and incredible as this may appear, it is one that I make on good authority; and this phase of cannibalism has also, I believe, come under the notice of certain traders and missionaries of old Calabar who have visited the district I speak of. There is little doubt that the abrupt cessation of the exportation of slaves, which was brought about on the west coast of Africa by British intervention, temporarily increased the prevalence of cannibalism in the Oil Rivers [including the Cross River] and Niger delta. *Having no longer a profitable market for their war captives and criminals, the natives have found it more convenient to consume them than to let them eat the bread of idleness and cumber the ground . . .*³⁵¹ [Emphasis added]

This temporary cannibalistic increase, Johnston implies, eased only because the surplus had been exhausted; one is left presuming the natives would have carried on if given more opportunity. However, on whose “good authority” did Johnson receive this information? Why did he not name those “certain traders and missionaries of old Calabar” he believed to have knowledge of such goings on?

Mary Kingsley was an acclaimed adventurer and writer during this time. She traveled widely throughout West Africa, including Nigeria, and her reputation was bolstered by newspaper accounts of her exploits. One story published in *The New York Times* in 1895 (originally run by *The London Times*), carries such an informative title that it requires no further comment: “Strange Journey for a Woman: It Takes Her Among the Cannibal Tribes of Africa . . . She Has a Lot of Perilous Adventures, but Escapes Without Harm, and Gathers Valuable Specimens.”³⁵²

³⁵¹ Johnson, “Chances for the Increase of Cannibalism,” 12.

³⁵² “Strange Journey for a Woman . . .,” *The New York Times*, 25 December 1895, 15. Kingsley’s 1344-word follow-up piece, “African Character Studied,” appeared in the *Times* on 10 January 1896, 2. *The New York Times* ran a nearly 1800-word piece, “A Woman in Africa,” on 13 February 1897 (section BR1) and published her obituary three years later, “Miss Mary Kingsley Dead: Celebrated African Explorer and Writer Expires Near Capetown” (6 June 1900), 6.

In the early pages of Kingsley's popular book, *West African Studies* (1899), the author creates an atmosphere that draws heavily on the mystique of the "Dark Continent" in which one must not trust the natives, who are made out to be potentially very dangerous, even murderous. Riding in a steamer along the coast of Sierra Leone on her approach to the continent, she quotes her European guide, "... of course they are cannibals; they are all cannibals, are natives down here when they get the chance."³⁵³ Kingsley included in this book a substantial report on southeastern Nigeria by one Count C. N. de Cardi, whom she praises in her introductory remarks for "possess[ing] an unrivalled knowledge of the natives of the Niger Delta, gained, as all West Coasters know, by personal experience."³⁵⁴ Thus, we are to accept his report without question.

In it, de Cardi repeatedly attempts to demonstrate Cross River cannibalism. For example, he states, "it was a common thing to see human flesh offered for sale in the [Calabar] market within a very few years of the establishment of the British Protectorate."³⁵⁵ Was this more bushmeat, perhaps? In any case, the anecdote sounds familiar. Further, its lack of specificity—de Cardi does not actually tell us that *he* saw the meat in question—leads me to believe it derives from Hutchinson's similar noted above. De Cardi continues:

[At] Ofurekpe . . . its chief and people are everything to be desired, the town is clean the houses are commodious, the inhabitants are friendly, and their country is delightful. They are a little given to cannibalism, but, I am

³⁵³ Kingsley, *West African Studies*, 42.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, vii.

³⁵⁵ De Cardi in Kingsley, 558.

very credibly informed, only practise this custom on their prisoners of war.³⁵⁶

But de Cardi was not yet finished. Having evidently read about, and so feeling sympathetic with the plight of Johnson in Atam country just noted, he was compelled also to mention that place, “a country inhabited, so I was informed, by the most inveterate of cannibals.”³⁵⁷ So despite his vast experience—which was in fact questioned at the time³⁵⁸—de Cardi was himself a little given to hearsay.

By this time, while other forms of stereotyping continued, sightings of *Polyphemus africanus* were relegated to the Calabar hinterland; in other words, to areas that remained to be “opened up” and about which the British knew little, though this is really beside the point that they had an enemy to conquer. Thus, it may not be surprising that the “Long Juju” at Arochukwu was frequently associated with “cannibal feasts.”³⁵⁹

A *New York Times* article from 1906 carries the no-nonsense headline, “Ate a British Official,” but is typically vague concerning the details of the alleged cannibalistic activity:

. . . a horrible story of cannibalism in Nigeria, of which Dr. Stewart of the Southern Nigerian Government was the victim. The doctor accompanied an expedition to the interior, but was separated from the main body. With only a few carriers he proceeded to Calabar River. He was riding a bicycle, and . . . missed the main road and ran into the village of a hostile tribe.

The carriers returning found Dr. Stewart’s bicycle and later parts

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 564.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁸ See the letter by R. R. W. Walker, The British Museum, London, Department of Ethnography, Museum of Mankind, ETH. DOC. 220.

³⁵⁹ British Foreign Office correspondence from Consul Annesley to Lord Salisbury, 29 October 1890. Quoted in Ayandele, 114-115.

of his body. . . . The investigation which followed showed that the body had been horribly mutilated, and there was undoubted evidence that it had been partially eaten.³⁶⁰

Now, considering the fact that there were no witnesses to Dr. Stewart's death, it is not at all clear that a person was even responsible for it. The evidence presented is more suggestive of an animal attack than one by fearsome cannibals—shouldn't they have cooked him first?

In 1910, an English station near Obudu in the upper Cross River area was “besieged by cannibal hordes” of Munchis (now called Tiv), who were described as “powerful savages,” who were “almost the only Nigerian tribe not subdued by the British advance . . . and now they are waiting for any small party that ventures out of the station.”³⁶¹ One imagines them lurking in the shadows, hungrily sharpening their knives in anticipation. The British, however, were not exactly helpless—they were after all carrying out an overt mission of conquest. Though the article initially lists the besieged as “five Englishmen and a few native troops,” we soon learn there was actually present “a company of the Southern Nigerian Rifles and two maxim guns” that was later reinforced with a second company. A company included approximately one hundred men. And the Maxim gun was an early machine gun capable of firing 500 rounds per minute. What a perfectly sensational foil to legitimize the British effort and rouse popular support back home.

In 1914, A. C. Douglas, a District Commissioner in Nigeria, described what he euphemistically called “the opening up of Eket as a Government station”:

³⁶⁰ “Ate a British Official,” *The New York Times*, 5 January 1906, 7.

³⁶¹ “Besieged by Cannibals,” Special Cable to *The Washington Post*, 24 April 1910, 6.

My acquaintance with the Ibibios commenced in October 1898, when I was sent from Opobo to start the [Eket] District. . . . it took seven separate expeditions to reduce these truculent savages to order. . . for they had a wonderful knack of bobbing up again and giving trouble after being beaten, and from a military point of view are the most “sporting tribe” imaginable.³⁶²

Once the colonial government was established, punitive missions became less frequent and *Polyphemus africanus* retreated—but certainly was not extinct.

M. D. W. Jeffreys, a Rhodes scholar and Ph.D. recipient, was a district officer in Nigeria in 1935 when he published his book, *Old Calabar and Notes on the Ibibio Language*.³⁶³ There, after admitting that not much is known about the Ibibio or their history, Jeffreys writes:

Though there is evidence that some of the clans at one time were man-eaters it has not been true of the tribe as a whole for centuries No cases of cannibalism have been recorded among the Ibibio since 1921, when one doubtful case was reported, on hearsay evidence only, as occurring among the Anang. The charge of cannibalism among the Ibibio has more picturesqueness in it than truth. On the other hand, of the Efik, Consul Hutchinson wrote in 1861. “During the year 1859 human flesh was exposed for sale, as butcher’s meat, in the market at Duke Town, Old Kalabar.”³⁶⁴

Jeffreys, while rightfully dubious on some accounts, incongruously accepts Hutchinson’s remarks without question, and so is able to leave open the case for local cannibalism. He also cannot resist mentioning a scene he apparently witnessed during some deliberations among two rival Ibibio clans, in which he claimed the retort, “Shut up, or I’ll eat you,”

³⁶² This appears in Douglas’s 1914 letter to P. A. Talbot, quoted in *Life in Southern Nigeria*, 295.

³⁶³ M. D. W. Jeffreys, *Old Calabar and Notes on the Ibibio Language* (Calabar: Hope Waddell Teaching Institute Press, 1935).

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

was the source of contention.³⁶⁵ Now, I admit it is a rather potent rhetorical device, but what does this obvious attempt at intimidation have to do with actual cannibalism? The reason for Jeffreys' ambivalence becomes clear, however, as he segues into a detailed description of the history of the "opening up" of Ibibioland between 1901-1933, during which time it often became "necessary" to use troops to "clear up matters."³⁶⁶ Thus, a thirty-year campaign becomes all the more heroic if your side has been battling an enemy who just might be cannibals.

Toward the end of the colonial period, interestingly, *Polyphemus africanus* enjoyed a nostalgic revival. For example, *White Queen of the Cannibals* by A. J. Bueltmann (undated but c.1955), a popular fictionalized story for young people based on the life of the indefatigable missionary Mary Slessor (1848-1915), opens with the following remarks:

"On the West coast of Africa is the country of Nigeria. The chief city is Calabar," said Mother Slessor . . . "Black people live there. Many of these are cannibals who eat other people."³⁶⁷

Incredibly, the revised version of this book, *Mary Slessor: White Queen of the Cannibals*, by Ruth Johnson Jay, was in print as recently as 1985 and another edition may yet be forthcoming.³⁶⁸

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 20-22.

³⁶⁷ A. J. Bueltmann, *White Queen of the Cannibals: The Story of Mary Slessor* (Chicago: Moody Press, n.d.), 7.

³⁶⁸ As related to me by a Moody Press official, Jay obtained the rights to this book in 2002 and so one might presume another edition is forthcoming (personal communication, 20 April 2004).

In 1957, the Rev. Donald McFarlan's book *Calabar* (a popular history of missionary work) kept the trope alive. Recounting a failed 1914 colonial "expedition" to the Ekoi area, the writer noted, "The villages were seething with unrest. Government attempts to open up this very remote part led to the District Officer being driven out by the cannibal people of Ogoja."³⁶⁹ With his euphemism, "open up," McFarlan attempts to gain the sympathy of readers for the imperiled District Officer. What he actually meant was, "coerce at gunpoint," which makes clear the native resistance.

That same year, Cecil Howard's biography of Mary Kingsley offered the following observation:

[Some secret societies] existed solely for the organization of murder, sometimes for the purpose of sacrificial cannibalism. There was one of these "Leopard" societies in the Calabar district, in which the last member to enter had to provide, for the benefit of the other members, the body of a relative of his own.³⁷⁰

Even as late as 1960, literally on the eve of Nigerian independence later that year, *The New York Times* ran the story, "27 Nigerian Tribesmen Accused of Joining in Cannibalistic Rite," written by the Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Homer Bigart.³⁷¹ It recounts a land dispute between two clans of the "illiterate, pagan Izi," around the town of Obubra in the middle Cross River area, "near the Calabar frontier." Having thus set the scene at the wild fringes of civilization, Bigart offers his readers some requisite historical context, about which he states matter-of-factly, "cannibalism, commonplace in

³⁶⁹ McFarlan, 142.

³⁷⁰ Cecil Howard, *Mary Kingsley* (London: Hutchinson, 1957), 71.

³⁷¹ Homer Bigart, "27 Nigerian Tribesmen Accused of Joining in Cannibalistic Rite," *The New York Times*, 30 January 1960, 4.

these parts a century ago, rarely happens today.” As with the case of the unfortunate Dr. Stewart, here the discovery of mutilated bodies is considered to strongly imply—if not actually prove—that cannibalism had taken place. Despite the headline, Bigart notes the accused in police custody were charged with the killings (but not cannibalism per se).

Like the other accounts mentioned here, this report was based on hearsay. But what was the Bigart’s motivation for writing it? Earlier proponents of Cross River cannibalism were usually rather transparent in their efforts. For example, it is not surprising that those involved in the slave trade, such as Pereira (c. 1505), Watts (1672), Snelgrave (1734), and Grant (1830), would malign their intended victims because they had a vested interest to maintain by doing so. I would even speculate that some of the rumors of cannibalism so often associated with the Cross River interior were even spread by the locals themselves. Not that they actually ate people, but as a means of self-defense against slave raiders. Keeping in mind that this area suffered severely because their activities—in fact, the nearby town of Arochukwu was a major slave depot—it makes sense that anyone so affected would resist by *any* means possible. During the eighteenth century, in conjunction with increasing British efforts in the Bight of Biafra, the region’s contribution to the slave trade more than trebled, accounting for twenty percent of the entire trade by century’s end. Putting this into human terms, consider that between 1741-1810, nearly 900,000 Africans were shipped out of the Bight of Biafra.³⁷²

Perhaps psychological warfare was their best option against the slavers: *You may try to take us, but if we catch you first, we will eat you up!* For reasons of their own, the

³⁷² Lovejoy and Richardson, 89-115.

missionaries later kept the trope alive. It is also very telling that as the British colonial effort gained momentum in southeastern Nigeria, popular reports of cannibalism became more frequent and more gruesome, targeting especially those groups not previously known and who, more importantly, resisted the British encroachment. What is more, it was believed the carvings made by Cross River peoples evidenced their cannibalism, i.e. scary-looking carved heads = “trophy” heads = headhunters = cannibals. For their part, being quite literally outgunned, the peoples of the interior may have met this latest foreign enemy with their own threats of cannibalism, and they appear to have remained threats only. There is no good evidence, for example, that any colonial officer ever met such a fate. Whether or not cannibalism ever occurred there is well beside the point that it has all too often been employed as an easy excuse to vilify the region’s peoples in furtherance of various European agendas—be they economic, political, or moral—to exert and maintain power over them.

Considering the evidence of the terracottas already presented, *Polyphemus africanus*, who in the West for so long was conflated with Cross River peoples to no good end, may now be understood as a relatively late imposition. Yet, for the 450 years since Pacheco Pereira’s account, Western perceptions of the Cross River changed little, that is, until colonialism formally ended. Even so, considering that Bueltmann’s *White Queen of the Cannibals* may yet enjoy another printing, *Polyphemus africanus* is not quite extinct, “near the Calabar frontier.”

FIGURES

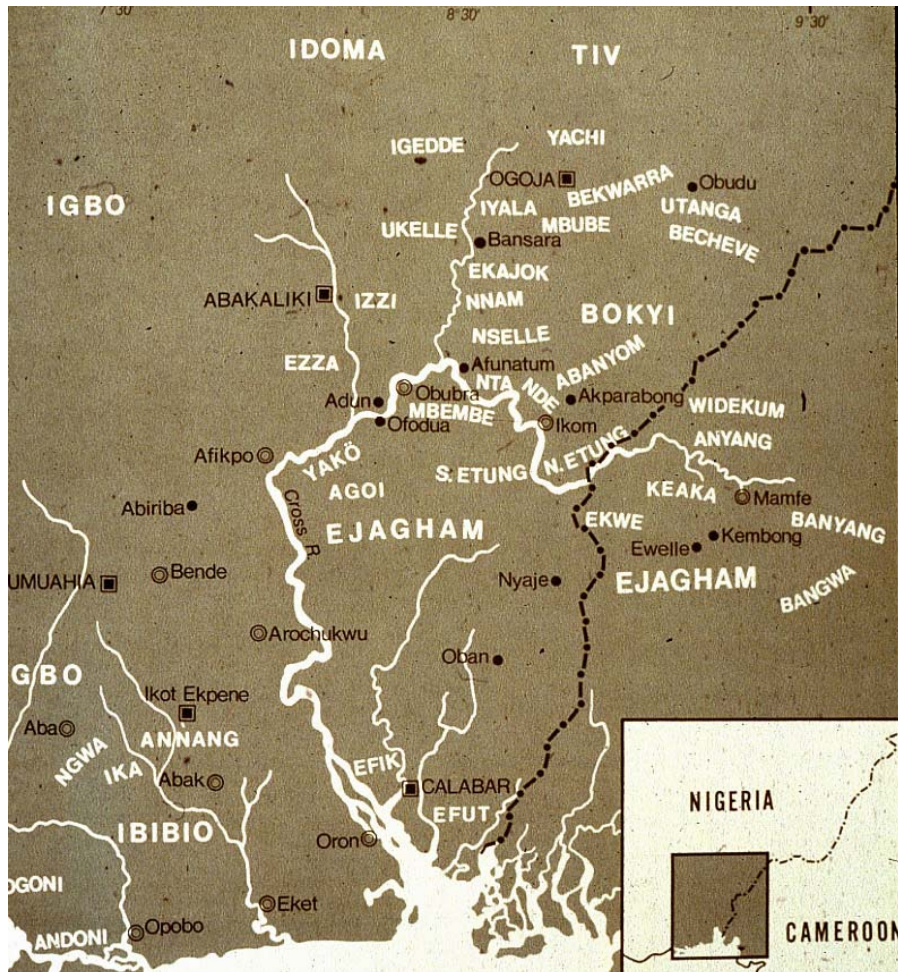


Figure 1.1
Map of the Cross River Region of Nigeria/Cameroon
Source: Nicklin and Salmons, "Cross River Art Styles."



Figure 1.2
Terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang, near Calabar,
Cross River State, Nigeria.
D. 29.2 cm, H. 14.5 cm.
Department of Art History and Archaeology,
University of Maryland, courtesy of the National
Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria.
Photo: Christopher Slogar.

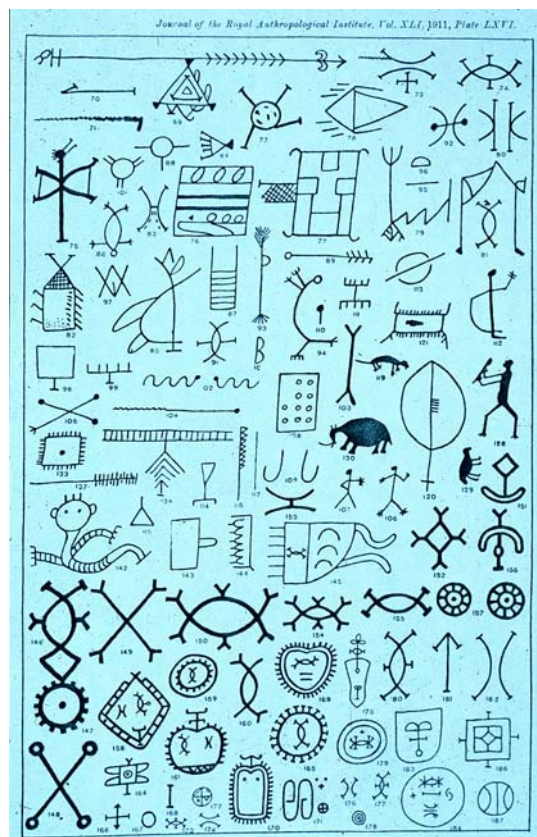


Figure 1.3
Nsibidi signs collected in the early twentieth century by J. K. Macgregor.
 Source: Macgregor, "Some Notes on Nsibidi."



Figure 1.4
Carved monoliths, Alok, Cross River State, Nigeria.
The incised decoration is heightened with colored chalk
in preparation for the 1991 New Yam Festival.
Photograph courtesy of Ekpo Eyo.

Radiocarbon Dates Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria

<u>Site</u>	<u>Sample</u>	<u>C14 Dates</u>	<u>AD</u>
Old Marian Road	Beta 128892	1400 +/- 90 BP	cal 445 - 785
	Beta 128891	1380 +/- 90 BP	cal 530 - 855
Ndidem Usang Iso	Teledyne I-18, 466	1190 +/- 90 BP	cal 660 - 1020
Abasi Edem	Teledyne I-18, 732	1220 +/- 80 BP	cal 660 - 990
	Teledyne I-18, 731	1090 +/- 80 BP	cal 770 - 1140
Okang Mbang	Teledyne I-18, 918	850 +/- 80 BP	cal 1020 - 1290
	Teledyne I-18, 919	690 +/- 125 BP	cal 1050 - 1440

Figure 1.5
Radiocarbon dates for Calabar archaeological sites.
Chart by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 1.6
 Woman at Calabar wearing print cloth with a pattern of
 conjoined arcs, the *nsibidi* sign for love or marriage.
 Photograph courtesy of Ekpo Eyo.



Figure 1.7
 Procession of Igbo Leopard Society members wearing *ukara* cloth during
 the funeral of a fellow member in 1988. Note the opposed arcs decorating
 the man at center. Photograph by Eli Bendor. Source: Pirani and Smith,
The Visual Arts of Africa: Gender, Power, and Life Cycle Rituals.



Figure 3.1
Anthropomorphic Terracotta Figurine (Type II) from Akim Qua, Calabar.
H. 19 cm.
National Commission for Museums and Monuments,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.
Photograph courtesy of Ekpo Eyo.



Figure 3.2

Two views of a partial terracotta globular vessel from the Cultural Center Site (1978), Calabar.

D. 28.8 cm, H. 14 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photographs courtesy of Ekpo Eyo.



Figure 3.3
Anthropomorphic Terracotta Figurine (Type I)
from Abasi Edem Street, Calabar (1996).
H. 25.3 cm
National Commission for Museums and Monuments,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar, A.1996.ORC.1.1
Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 3.4
The Old Marian Road site excavated by Ekpo Eyo in 1998.
Note the many objects that are inverted or turned sideways.
Photograph courtesy of Ekpo Eyo.



Figure 3.5
Terracotta bowl from the Old Marian Road site, Calabar (1998).
D. 31.1 cm, H. 15.6 cm.
National Commission for Museums and Monuments,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.
Photograph courtesy of Ekpo Eyo.



Figure 3.6
Terracotta jar from the Old Marian Road site, Calabar (1998).
National Commission for Museums and Monuments,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.
Photograph courtesy of Ekpo Eyo.



Figure 3.7
Terracotta headrest from the Old Marian Road site, Calabar (1998).
National Commission for Museums and Monuments,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.
Photograph courtesy of Ekpo Eyo.



Figure 3.8
The Abasi Edem site excavated by Ekpo Eyo in 1996.
Note the crescentic layout of the artifact concentrations.
Photograph courtesy of Ekpo Eyo.



Figure 3.9
Detail of Concentration A (at top, above), Abasi Edem site.
Note the inverted bowls.
Photograph courtesy of Ekpo Eyo.



Figure 3.10
A spoil heap at the looted site of Obot Okoho, 1997.
Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 3.11
Two terracotta bowls excavated by Ekpo Eyo at Oron.
H. (approximate) 5.5 cm (left) and 9.5 cm (right).
The interior rims are decorated with a repeated meander pattern and
the bases were intentionally pierced before firing.
National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Oron Museum.
Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 3.12
Terracotta headrest excavated by Ekpo Eyo at Oron.
H. approximately 15 cm.
National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Oron Museum.
Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 3.13
Terracotta vessel excavated by Thurstan Shaw at the Igbo-Jonah site, Igbo-Ukwu.
H. 40.6 cm.
National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
National Museum, Lagos.
Source: Shaw, *Igbo-Ukwu*.



Figure 4.1
 Terracotta headrest from Okang Mbang.
 H. 13 cm , W. 11.7 cm.
 National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
 Old Residency Museum, Calabar, A.1997.ORC.2.77.
 Photographs by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.2

Two terracotta headrests from Okang Mbang.
 H. 13.5 cm, W. 11.7 cm (left); H. 12.3 cm, W. 11 cm (right).
 National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
 Old Residency Museum, Calabar, A.1997.ORB.2.86 (left),
 A.1997.ORB.2.85 (right).
 Photographs by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.3

Five small terracotta bowls on pedestal bases.

Note the variation in profiles.

From left: Okang Mbang, H. 4.76 cm, D. 8.3 cm.

Okang Mbang, H. 7.0 cm, D. 8.1 cm.

Okang Mbang, H. 6.4, D. 14.3.

Okang Mbang, H. 7.3 cm, D. 14.1 cm.

Obot Okoho, H. 9.8 cm D. 16.5 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,

Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photographs by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.4
Small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.
H. 7.3 cm, D. 14.1 cm.
Note the grooved and beaded decoration.
National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.
Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.5
Underside view of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.
H. 6.7 cm, D. 14.6 cm.
This example features an interlace design on the body.
National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.
Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.6

Underside view of a small bowl from Okang Mbang
showing termination of grooved elements as closed loops.

H. 4.8 cm, D. 14 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.7

Underside view of a fragment of a small terracotta bowl
from Okang Mbang.

H. 7.9 cm, D. 15.9 cm (approximate).

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.8

Underside view of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.

H. 5.4 cm, D. 11.1 cm.

Note the cruciform arrangement of the four decorated panels.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,

Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.9
Concentric circles.
 Small (incomplete) terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.
 H. 7 cm, D. 14 cm.
 National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
 Old Residency Museum, Calabar.
 Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.10

Concentric circles.

Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.

D. 12.7 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,

Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.11

Concentric circles.

Underside view of a small (incomplete) terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.

Note also the interlace design on the body.

H. 7.5 cm, D. 16.2 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,

Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.12

Concentric circles.

Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.

H. 8.6 cm, D. 14 cm.

Note also the confronted arcs above and below the circles.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,

Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.13

Concentric circles.

Base of a small terracotta bowl attributed the Okang Mbang area.

D. 18.2 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,

Old Residency Museum, Calabar, P.2002.ORB.A.1.3.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.14

Concentric circles.

Underside view of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.

H. 5.9 cm, D. 15.6 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.15

Concentric circles.

Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.

D. 11.7 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.16

Concentric circles.

Base from small terracotta bowl from Obot Okoho.

D. 10.2 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,

Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.17
Concentric circles.
Small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.
H. 6.7 cm, D. 14.5 cm.
National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.
Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.18

Concentric circles.

Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.

University of Maryland Department of Art History and Archaeology,
Courtesy of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.19

Spiral.

Small terracotta bowl (incomplete) from Okang Mbang.

H. 7 cm, D. 16.5 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,

Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.20

Spiral.

Small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.

H. 7.3 cm, D. 14.1 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,

Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.21

Spiral.

Fragment of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang .

H. 5.1 cm, D. 10.2 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,

Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.22

Spiral.

Base from a small terracotta bowl from Obot Okoho.

D. 14.3 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.23

Spiral.

Small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang .

University of Maryland Department of Art History and Archaeology,
Courtesy of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria.

Photographs by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.24
Whorl.

Base from a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.
National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.
Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.25

Interlace.

Small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.

H. 6.5 cm, D. 17.5 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photographs by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.26

Interlace.

Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.

D. 11.1 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.27
Interlace.

Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.
D. 10 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.
Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.28
Interlace.

Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.
D. 10.2 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.
Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.29

Interlace.

Fragment of the base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.

D. 8.3 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.30

Interlace.

Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.

D. 11.4 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.31

Interlace.

Small (incomplete) terracotta bowl from Obot Okoho.

H. 7.6 cm, D. 16.5 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.32

Interlace.

Base of a small terracotta bowl from Obot Okoho.

D. 11 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.33

Interlace.

Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.

D. 12.1 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,

Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.34

Interlace.

Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang,

D. 12.1 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,

Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.35

Interlace.

Base of a small terracotta bowl from Obot Okoho.

D. 7.6 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.36

Interlace.

Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.

D. 13 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.37

Interlace.

Base of a small terracotta bowl from Obot Okoho.

D. 12.4 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.38
Confronted Arcs/Angles.
 Base of a small terracotta bowl from Obot Okoho.
 D. 12.4 cm.
 National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
 Old Residency Museum, Calabar.
 Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.39
Confronted Arcs/Angles.
 Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.
 D. 13.3 cm.
 National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
 Old Residency Museum, Calabar.
 Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.40
Confronted Arcs/Angles.
 Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.
 D. 11.7 cm.
 National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
 Old Residency Museum, Calabar.
 Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.41
Confronted Arcs/Angles.
 Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.
 D. 12.4 cm.
 National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
 Old Residency Museum, Calabar.
 Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.42
Confronted Arcs/Angles.
 Small (incomplete) terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.
 H. 7 cm, D. 17 cm.
 National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
 Old Residency Museum, Calabar.
 Photographs by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.43
Confronted Arcs/Angles.
 Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.
 D. 13.3 cm.
 National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
 Old Residency Museum, Calabar.
 Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.44
Confronted Arcs/Angles.
 Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.
 D. 10.6 cm.
 National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
 Old Residency Museum, Calabar.
 Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.45

Opposed Arcs/Angles.

Base of a small terracotta bowl from Obot Okoho.

D. 12.7 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.46

Confronted Arcs/Angles.

Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.

D. 11 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.47

Opposed Arcs/Angles.

Base of a small terracotta bowl from Obot Okoho.

D. 12.2 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,

Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.48

Opposed Arcs/Angles.

Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.

D. 11.4 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,

Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.49

Opposed Arcs/Angles.

Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.

D. 11.7 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.50
 Repeated Arcs/Angles.
 Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.
 D. 11.7 cm.
 National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
 Old Residency Museum, Calabar.
 Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.51
 Repeated Arcs/Angles.
 Base of a small terracotta bowl from Obot Okoho.
 D. 11 cm.
 National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
 Old Residency Museum, Calabar.
 Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.52

Lozenge.

Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.

D. 8.3 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.53

Lozenge.

Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.

D. 10.2 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.54

Lozenge.

Base of a small terracotta bowl from Obot Okoho.

D. 11.7 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.55

Lozenge.

Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.

D. 11.9 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.56

Lozenge.

Base of a small terracotta bowl from Obot Okoho.

D. 13.7 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.57

Lozenge.

Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang .

D. 11 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.58

Cruciform.

Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.

D. 9.2 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.59

Cruciform.

Base of a small terracotta bowl from Obot Okoho.

D. 11.7 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.60

Cruciform.

Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.

D. 13.4 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.61

Cruciform.

Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.

D. 9.8 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,

Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.62

Cruciform.

Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.

D. 10.3 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,

Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.63

Cruciform.

Base of a small terracotta bowl from Obot Okoho.

D. 11.1 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.64

Cruciform.

Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.

D. 8.9 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.65

Cruciform.

Small (incomplete) terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.

H. 7.6 cm, D. 16.5 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,

Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photographs by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.66

Star.

Small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.

H. 5.1 cm, H. 12.7 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,

Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photographs by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.67

Star.

Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.

D. 11.4 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,

Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.68

Star.

Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.

D. 8.3 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,

Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.69

Star.

Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.

D. 8.3 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.70

Central Straight Lines.

Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.

D. 9.2 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,

Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.71

Central Straight Lines.

Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.

D. 7.6 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,

Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.72

Central Straight Lines.

Base of a small terracotta bowl from Obot Okoho.

D. 11.7 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.73

Central Straight Lines.

Base of a small terracotta bowl from Obot Okoho.

D. 14 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.74

Central Straight Lines.

Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.

D. 8.1 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.75

Central Straight Lines.

Base of a small terracotta bowl from Obot Okoho.

D. 12.7 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.76
Central Straight Lines.
 Underside view of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.
 H. 4.8 cm, D. 14 cm.
 National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
 Old Residency Museum, Calabar.
 Photographs by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.77

Wavy Lines.

Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.

D. 11.4 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.78

Wavy Lines.

Base of a small terracotta bowl from the area of Okang Mbang.

D. 8.7 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.79

Wavy Lines.

Base of a small terracotta bowl from Obot Okoho.

D. 15.6 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.80

Wavy Lines.

Base of a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.

D. 8.6 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.81

Wavy Lines.

Small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.

H. 7.1 cm, D. 15.4 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.82

Wavy Lines.

Small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.

H. 7.1 cm, D. 15.4 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,

Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.83
Interwoven Lines.
Small terracotta bowl from Obot Okoho.
H. 5.9 cm, D. 16.5 cm.
National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.
Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.84

Interwoven Lines.

Fragment a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.

H. 4.8 cm, D. 8.9 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.

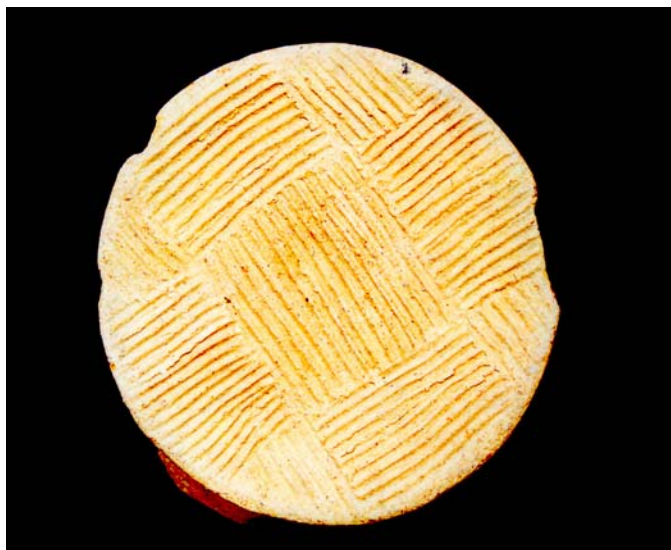


Figure 4.85

Grid.

Base of a small terracotta bowl from Obot Okoho.

D. 12.4 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.86

Filled Strip.

Base from a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.

D. 12.7 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.87

Filled Strip.

Base from a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.

D. 11 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.88

Filled Strip.

Base from a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.

D. 11.4 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.89

Filled Strip.

Base from a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.

D. 10.5 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.90

Filled Strip

Base from a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.

D. 13.3 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.91
Asymmetric Composite Designs.
 Base from a small terracotta bowl from Obot Okoho.
 D. 12.7 cm.
 National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
 Old Residency Museum, Calabar.
 Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.92
Asymmetric Composite Designs.
 Underside view of a small terracotta bowl from Obot Okoho.
 H. 5.1 cm, D. 17.5 cm.
 National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
 Old Residency Museum, Calabar.
 Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.93

Asymmetric Composite Designs.

Base from a small terracotta bowl from Obot Okoho.

D. 13 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,

Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.94

Asymmetric Composite Designs.

Base from a small terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.

D. 9.5 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,

Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.95
Bowls with interior decoration.
Reconstructed medium terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.
H. 9.5 cm, D. 22 cm.
National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.
Photographs by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.96

Bowls with interior decoration.

Reconstructed medium terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.

H. 8.1 cm, D. 17.9 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,

Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photographs by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.97
Fragment of a large terracotta bowl from Obot Okoho.
H. 9.8 cm, D. 20.3 cm.
National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.
Photographs by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.98
Fragment of a large terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.
H. 11.4 cm, D. 24.1 cm.
National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.
Photographs by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.99
Large terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.
H. 8.3 cm, D. 21 cm.
National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.
Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.100
Large terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.
H. 14.4 cm, D. 29.2 cm.
University of Maryland Department of Art History and Archaeology,
courtesy of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria.
Photographs by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.101
Large terracotta bowl from Okang Mbang.
H. 14.4 cm, D. 29.2 cm.
University of Maryland Department of Art History and Archaeology,
courtesy of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria
Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.102
Fragment of a jar from Okang Mbang (rim and base missing)
University of Maryland Department of Art History and Archaeology,
courtesy of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria.
Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.103
Fragment of a terracotta jar from Okang Mbang.
H. 14.6 cm, D. 7 cm.
National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.
Photographs by Christopher Slogar.

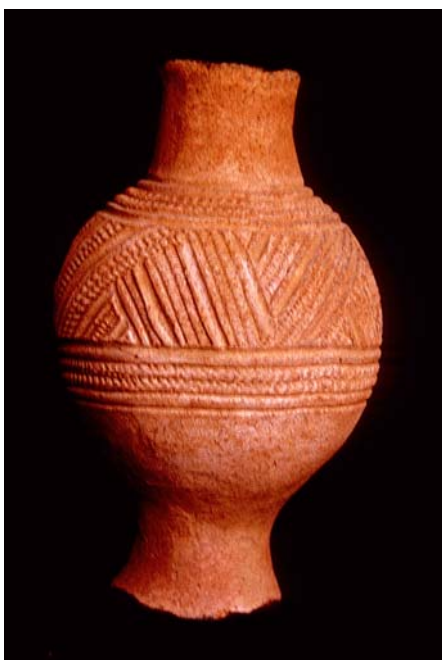


Figure 4.104
Terracotta jar from Okang Mbang.
H. 13.5 cm, D. 14.1 cm.
National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar, A.1998.ORC.2.129.
Photograph by Christopher Slogar.

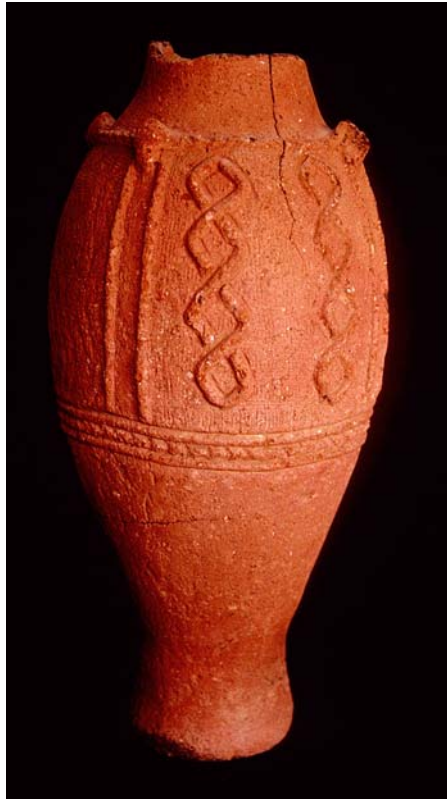


Figure 4.105
Terracotta jar from Okang Mbang.
H. 33.5 cm, D. 15.2 cm.
National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar, A.1998.ORB.2.129.
Photograph by Christopher Slogar.

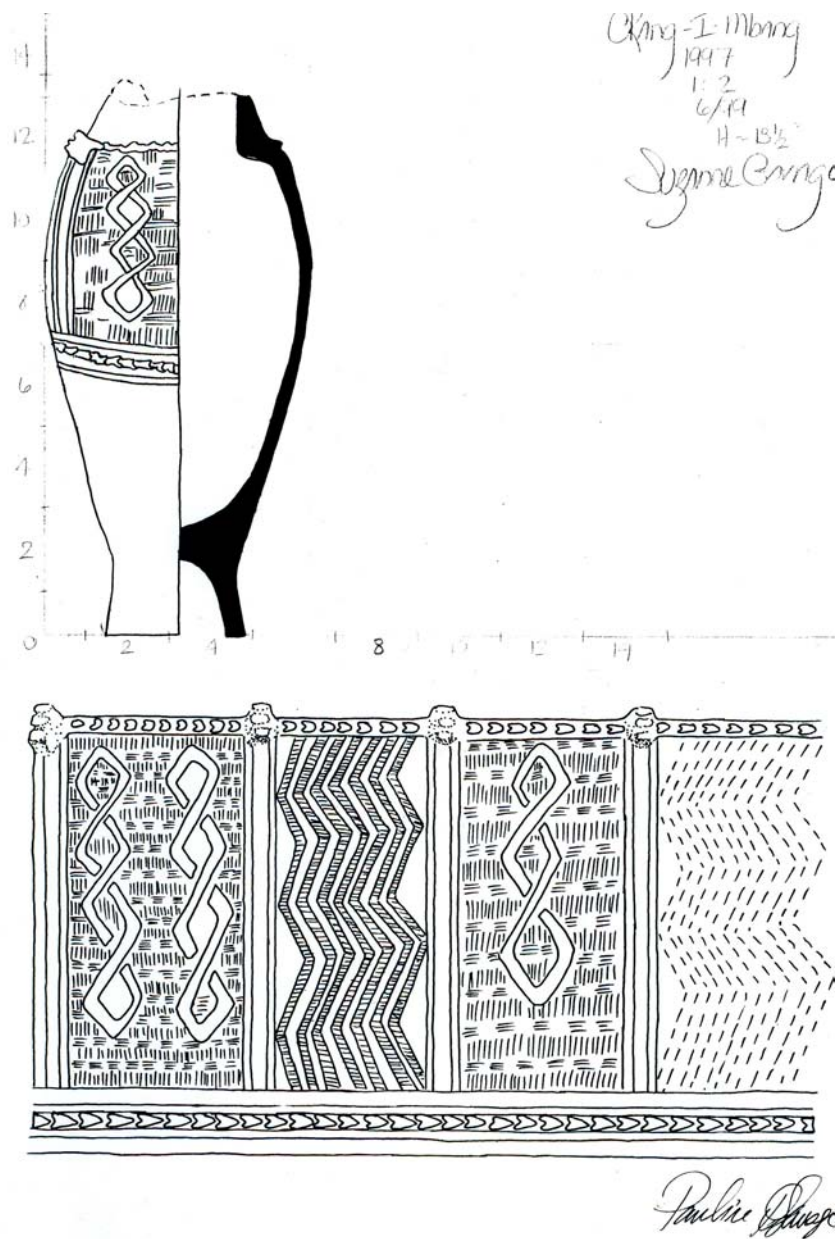


Figure 4.105a
Terracotta jar from Okang Mbang.
H. 33.5 cm, D. 15.2 cm.
National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar, A.1998.ORB.2.129.
Drawings by Leslie Brice and Pauline Savage, courtesy of Ekpo Eyo.



Figure 4.106
 Terracotta jar from Okang Mbang.
 H. 15.2 cm, D. 8.9 cm.
 National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
 Old Residency Museum, Calabar, A.1998.ORB.2.134.
 Photograph by Christopher Slogar.

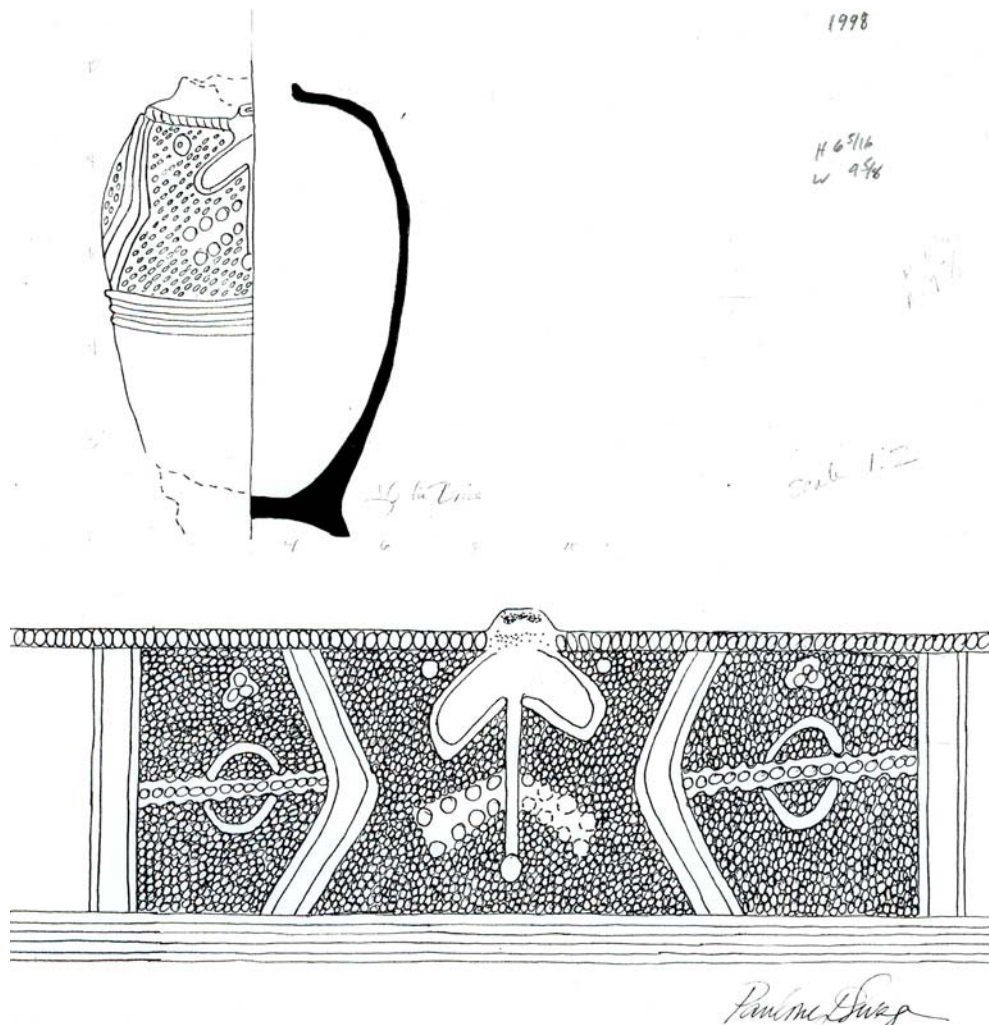


Figure 4.107
 Terracotta jar from Okang Mbang.
 H. 16 cm, D. 24.4 cm.
 National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
 Old Residency Museum, Calabar.
 Drawings by Leslie Brice and Pauline Savage, courtesy of Ekpo Eyo.

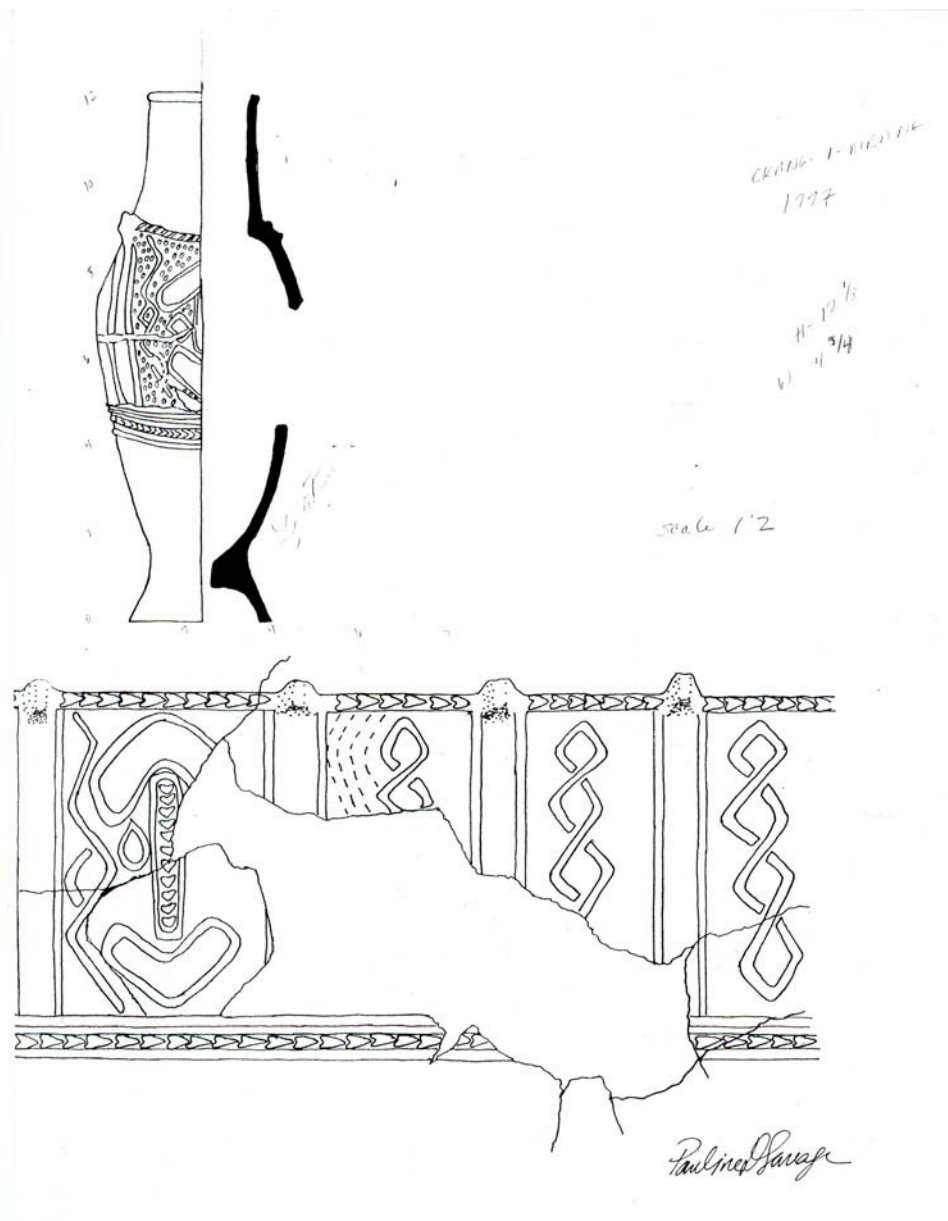


Figure 4.108
 Terracotta jar from Okang Mbang.
 H. 30.8 cm, D. 12.1 cm.
 National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
 Old Residency Museum, Calabar.
 Drawings by Leslie Brice and Pauline Savage, courtesy of Ekpo Eyo.

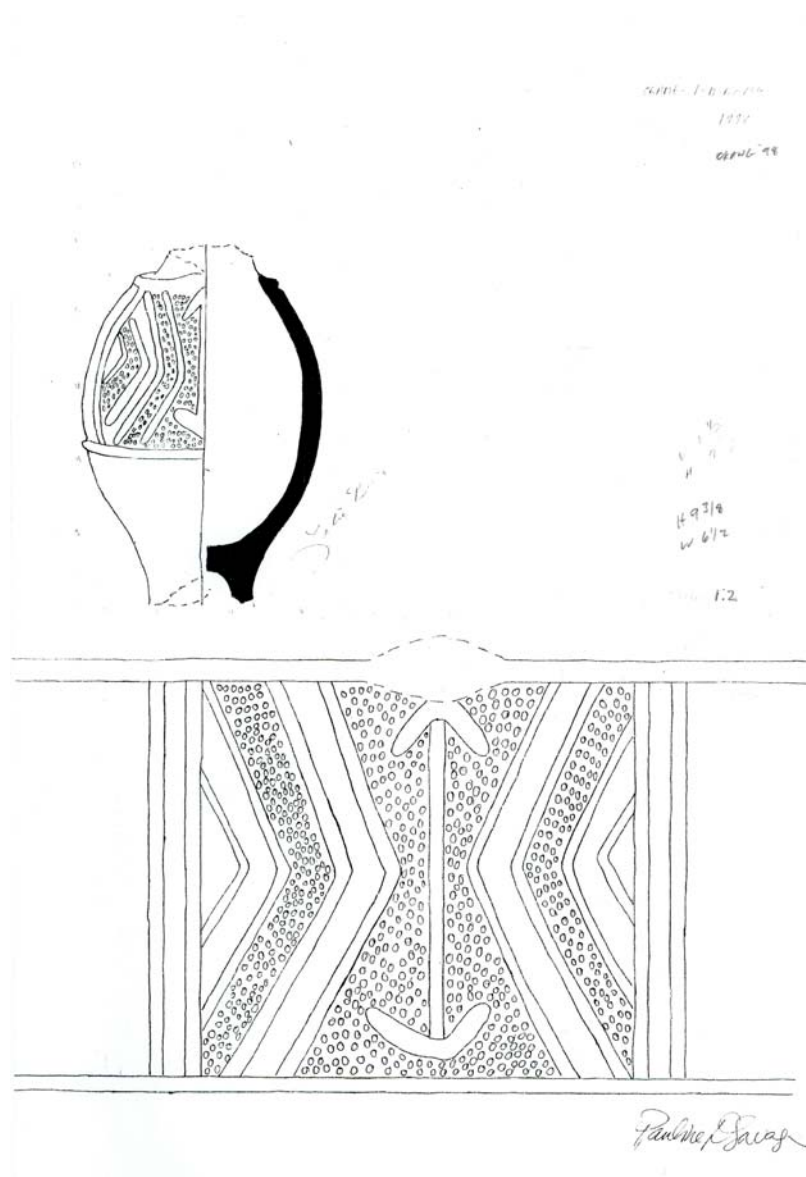


Figure 4.109
 Terracotta jar from Okang Mbang.
 H. 23.8 cm, D. 16.5 cm.
 National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
 Old Residency Museum, Calabar.
 Drawings by Leslie Brice and Pauline Savage, courtesy of Ekpo Eyo.

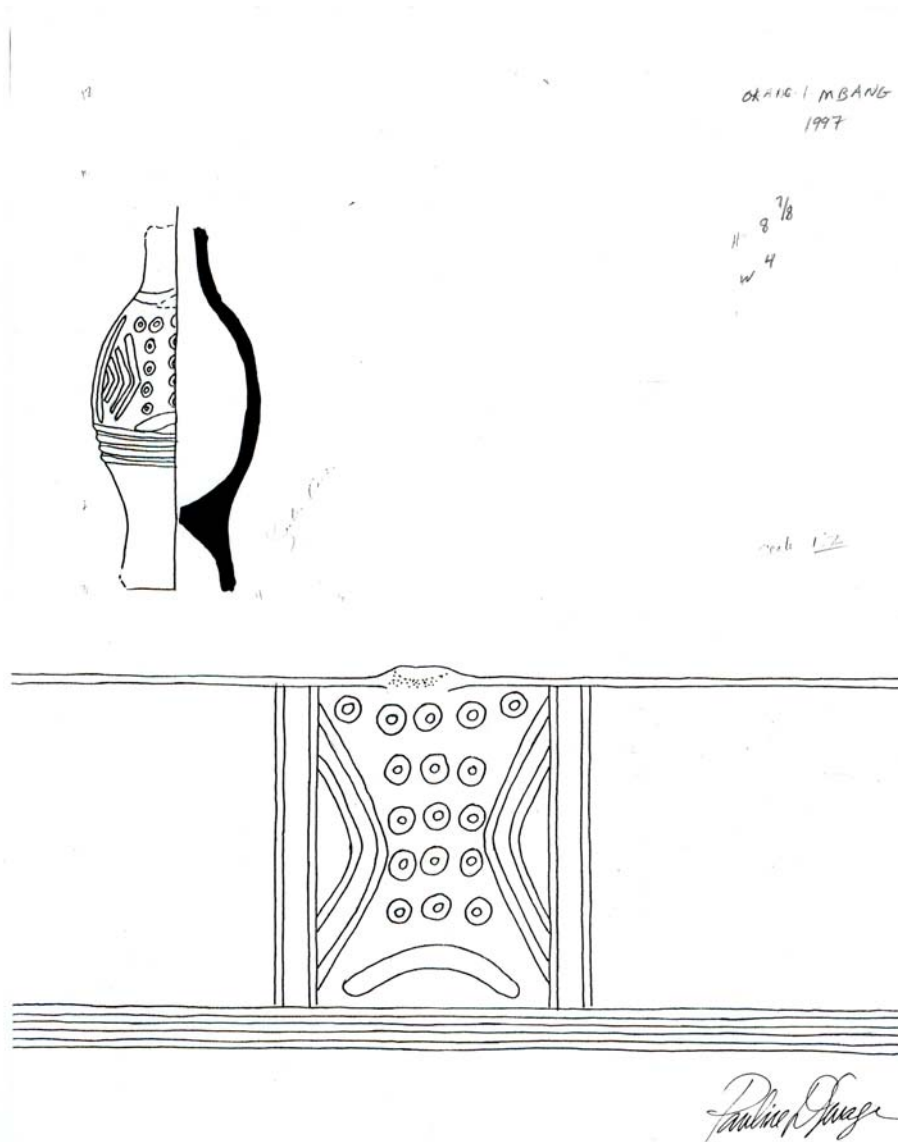


Figure 4.110
 Terracotta jar from Okang Mbang.
 H. 21.4 cm, D. 10.2 cm.
 National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
 Old Residency Museum, Calabar.
 Drawings by Leslie Brice and Pauline Savage, courtesy of Ekpo Eyo.

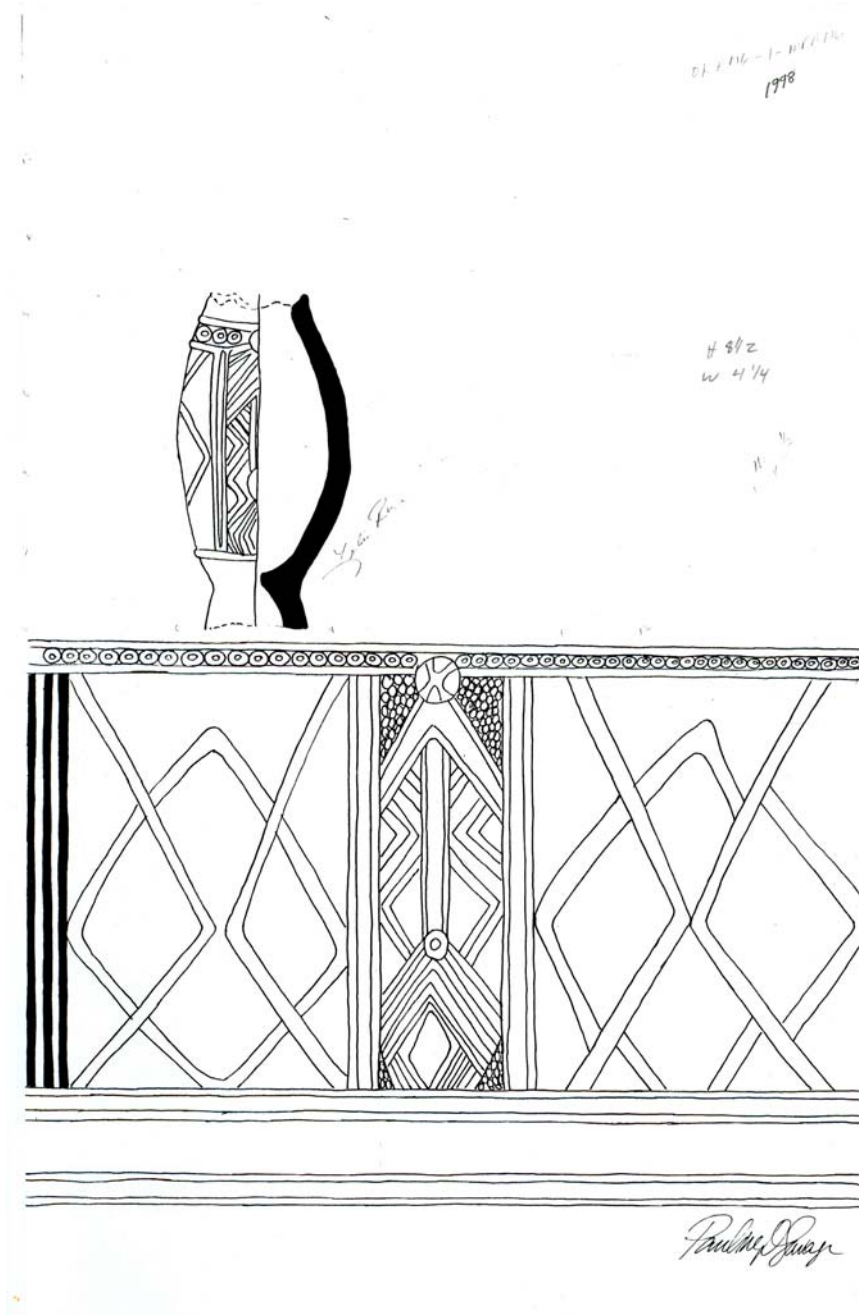


Figure 4.111
 Terracotta jar from Okang Mbang.
 H. 21.6 cm, D. 10.8 cm.
 National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
 Old Residency Museum, Calabar.
 Drawings by Leslie Brice and Pauline Savage, courtesy of Ekpo Eyo.

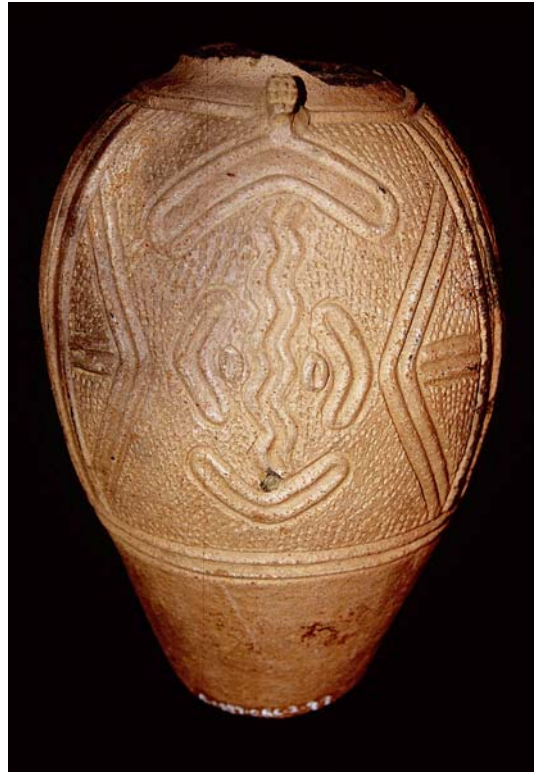


Figure 4.112
Terracotta jar from Okang Mbang.
H. 23.5 cm, D. 16.9 cm.
National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar, A.1997.ORC.2.99.
Photograph by Christopher Slogar.

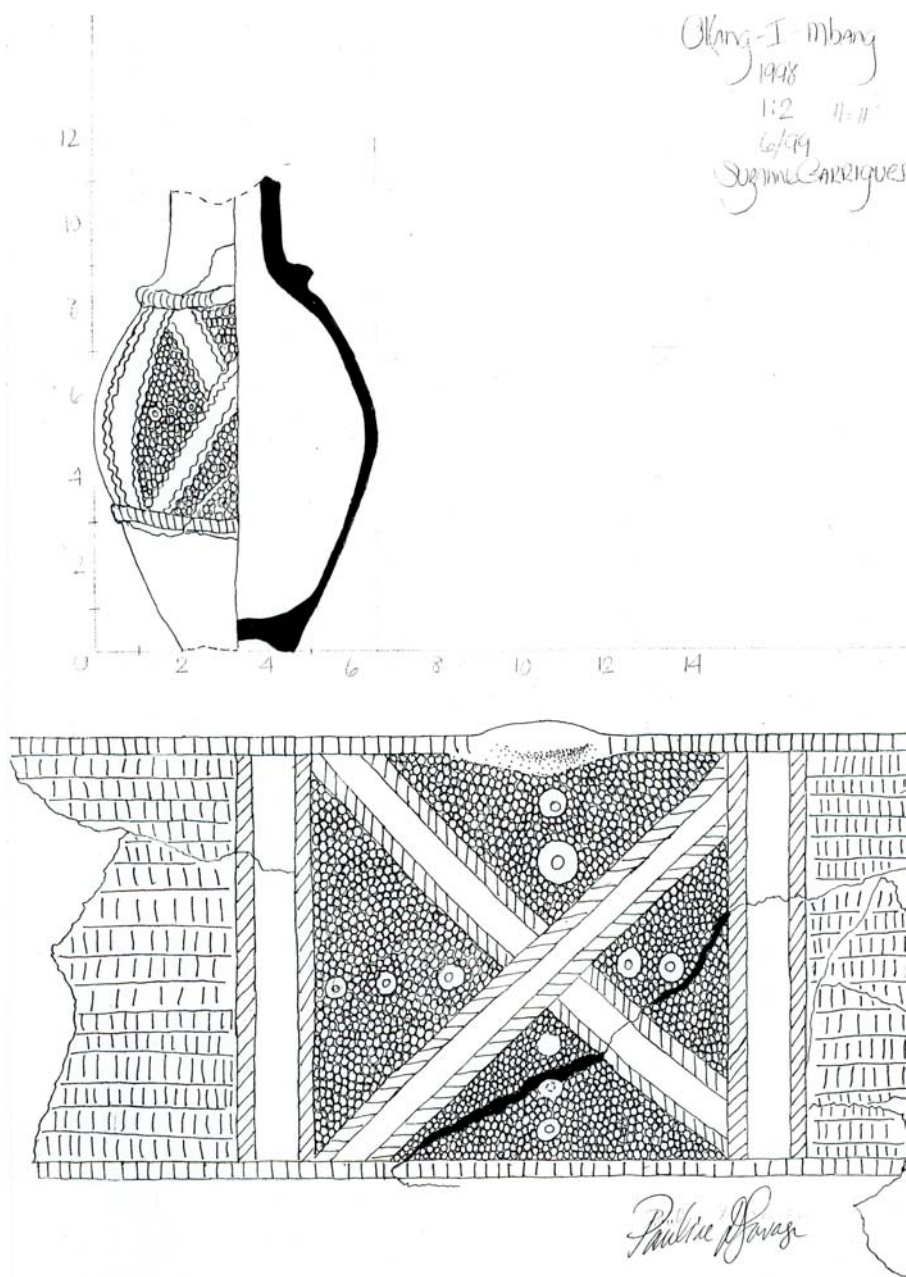


Figure 4.113
Terracotta jar from Okang Mbang.
H. 29.8 cm, 16.8 cm.
National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.
Drawings by Suzanne Garrigues and Pauline Savage, courtesy of Ekpo Eyo.

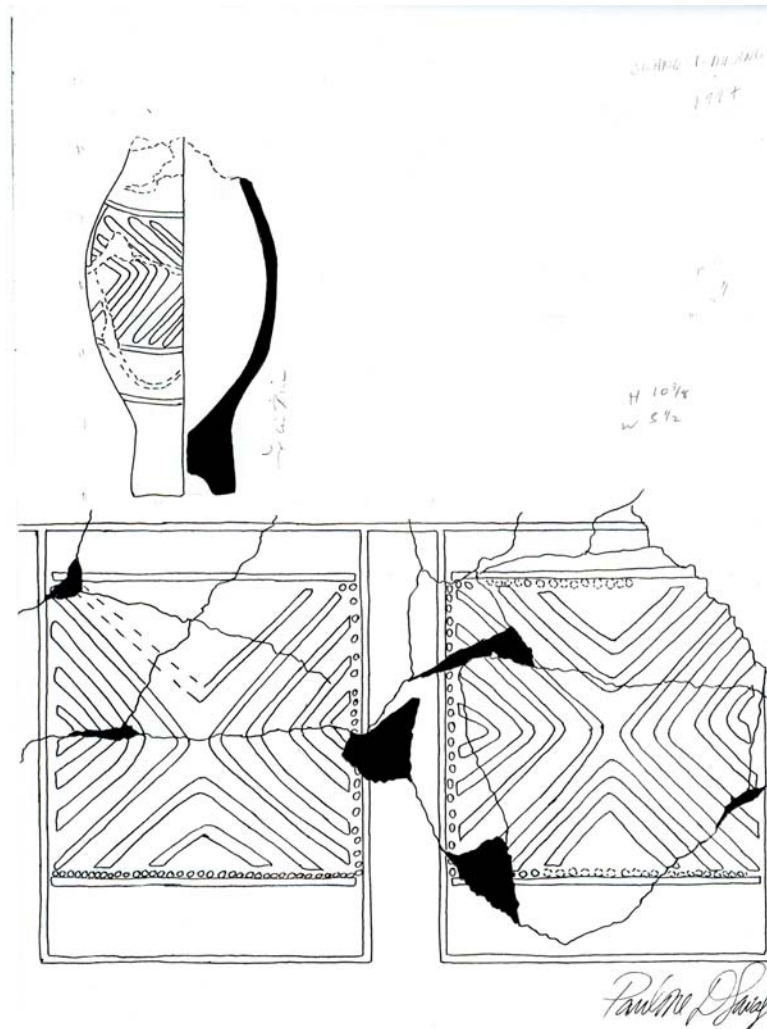


Figure 4.114
 Terracotta jar from Okang Mbang.
 H. 26.4 cm, D. 14 cm.
 National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
 Old Residency Museum, Calabar.
 Drawings by Leslie Brice and Pauline Savage, courtesy of Ekpo Eyo.

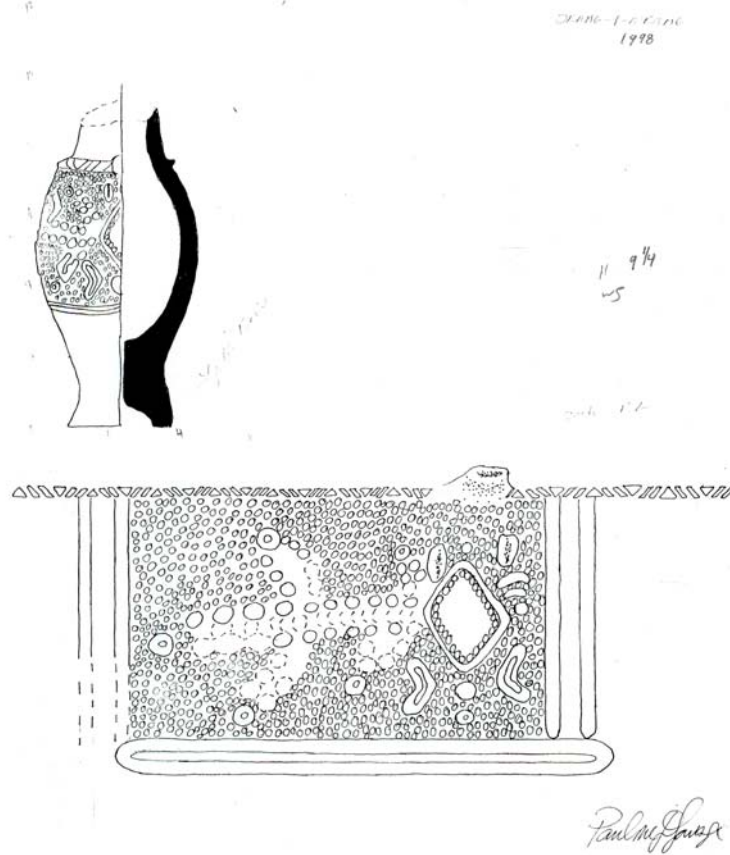


Figure 4.115
 Terracotta jar from Okang Mbang.
 H. 23.5 cm, D. 12.7.
 National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
 Old Residency Museum, Calabar.
 Drawings by Leslie Brice and Pauline Savage, courtesy of Ekpo Eyo.

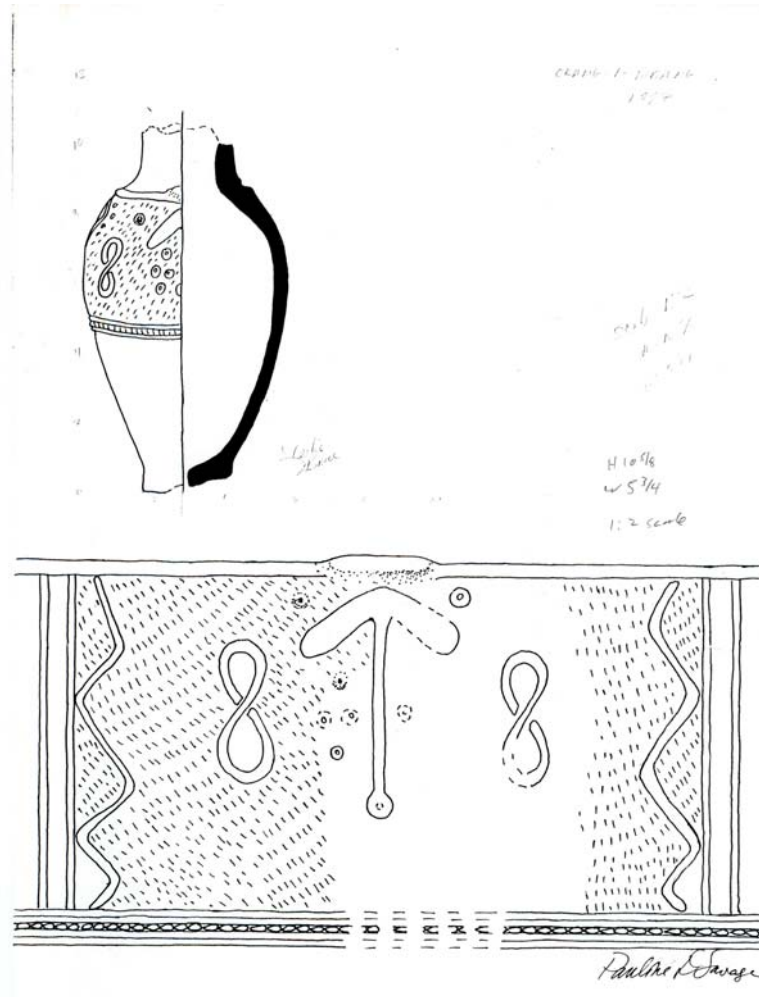


Figure 4.116
 Terracotta jar from Okang Mbang.
 H. 27 cm, D. 16.5 cm.
 National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
 Old Residency Museum, Calabar.
 Drawings by Leslie Brice and Pauline Savage, courtesy of Ekpo Eyo.

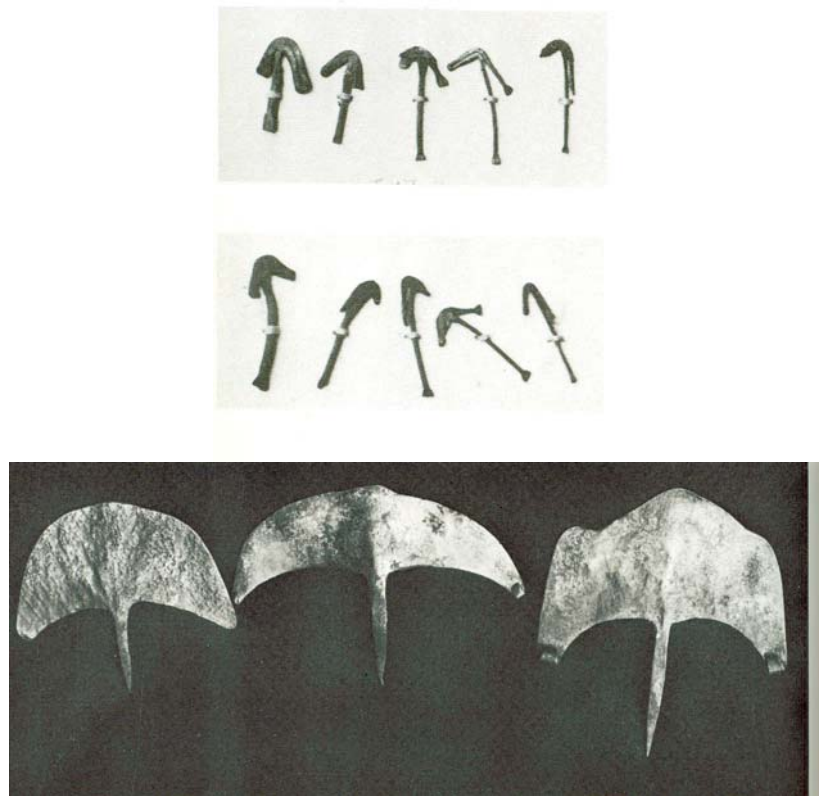


Figure 4.117
 Pre-colonial iron currencies of southeastern Nigeria.
 “Needle” (top); “Hoe” (bottom).
 Source: Eyo, *Nigeria and the Evolution of Money*.



Figure 4.118
Terracotta jar from Okang Mbang.
H. 25 cm.
University of Maryland Department of Art History and Archaeology,
courtesy of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria.
Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.119
Terracotta jar from Okang Mbang (detail, lower right).
University of Maryland Department of Art History and Archaeology,
courtesy of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria.
Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.120
Terracotta jar from Okang Mbang (reverse).
H. 25 cm.
University of Maryland Department of Art History and Archaeology,
courtesy of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria.
Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.121
Anthropomorphic terracotta figurine (side view).
Attributed to the Obot Okoho/Okang Mbang area.
Collection of Barry and Toby Hecht.
Photograph courtesy of The Art Gallery, University of Maryland.



Figure 4.122
Anthropomorphic terracotta figurine from Okang Mbang.
H. 30 cm, D. 19.2 cm.
National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar, A.1997.ORC.2.94.
Photograph by Christopher Slogar.

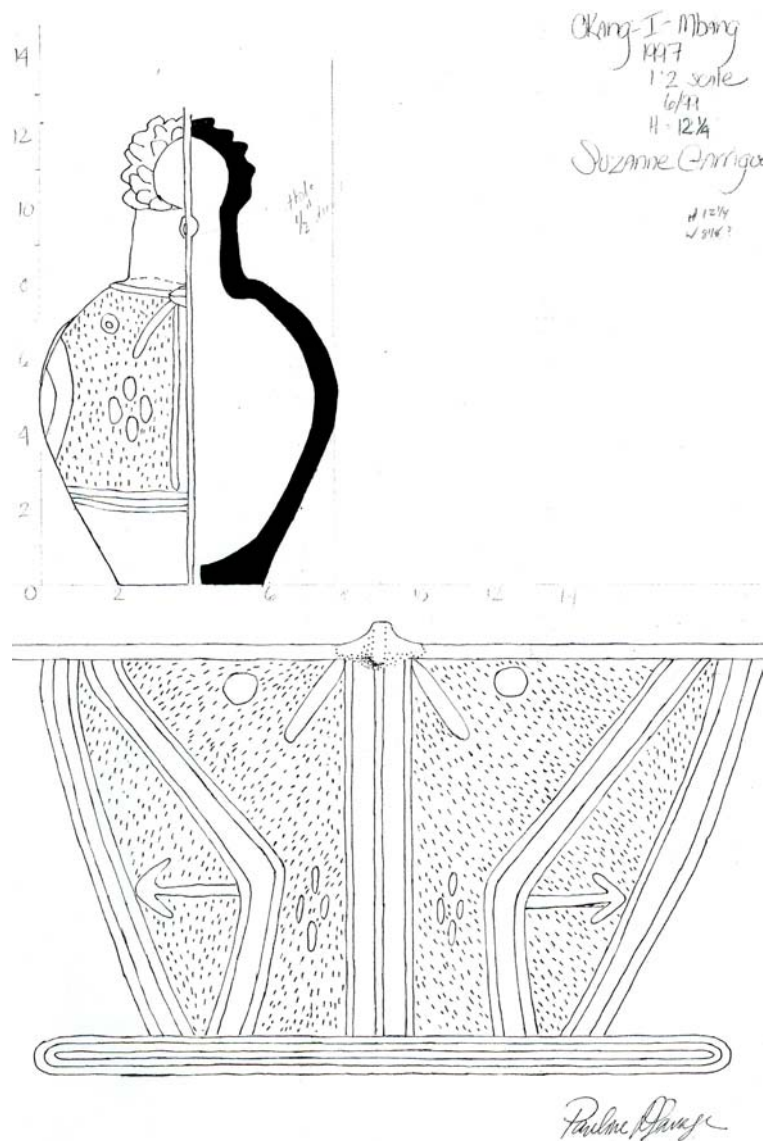


Figure 4.123
 Anthropomorphic terracotta figurine from Okang Mbang.
 H. 30 cm, D. 19.2 cm.
 National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
 Old Residency Museum, Calabar A.1997.ORB.2.94.
 Drawings by Suzanne Garrigues and Pauline Savage, courtesy of Ekpo Eyo.



Figure 4.124
Anthropomorphic terracotta figurine from the Obot Okoho/Okang Mbang area.
H. 30 cm (approximate).
Owner: Ekpo Eyo.
Photograph by Christopher Slogar, courtesy of Ekpo Eyo.



Figure 4.125

Detached head from an anthropomorphic terracotta figurine from Okang Mbang.
H. 12 cm (approximate).

University of Maryland Department of Art History and Archaeology,
courtesy of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.126

Detached head from an anthropomorphic terracotta figurine from Obot Okoho.
H. 12 cm (approximate).

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.127
Detached head from an anthropomorphic terracotta figurine from Oboto Okoho.
H. 12 cm (approximate).
National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.
Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.128
Detached head from an anthropomorphic terracotta figurine from Oboto Okoho.
H. 12 cm (approximate).
National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.
Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.129

Detached head from an anthropomorphic terracotta figurine from Obot Okoho.

H. 12 cm (approximate).

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,

Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.130
 Detached head from an anthropomorphic terracotta figurine from Obot Okoho.
 H. 12 cm (approximate).
 National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
 Old Residency Museum, Calabar.
 Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.131
 Detached head from an anthropomorphic terracotta figurine from Obot Okoho.
 H. 12 cm (approximate).
 National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
 Old Residency Museum, Calabar.
 Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.132

Eleven detached heads from anthropomorphic terracotta figurines
from the Obot Okoho/Okang Mbang area, seized from looters.

H. 6.5 – 11.1 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.

Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.133
Anthropomorphic terracotta figurine from Okang Mbang.
H. 37 cm, D. 19.3 cm.
National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar, A.1997.ORB.2.95.
Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.134
Terracotta female figurine.
Odukpani area.
H. 52 cm.

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.
Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.135
Terracotta female figurine.
H. 52 cm.
National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.
Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.136
Terracotta female figurine (detail).
National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.
Photograph by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 4.137
Calabar Efik maiden decorated with curvilinear designs,
ca. late 19th/ early 20th century.
National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria,
Old Residency Museum, Calabar.
Source: *The Story of Old Calabar:*
A Guide to the National Museum at the Old Residency, Calabar.



Figure 5.1
Ivory horn.
Attributed to the lower Cross River region, ca. 16th century.
L. 45 cm.
Note the geometric decoration.
The British Museum, London.
Source: Bassani, *African Art in Early European Collections*.

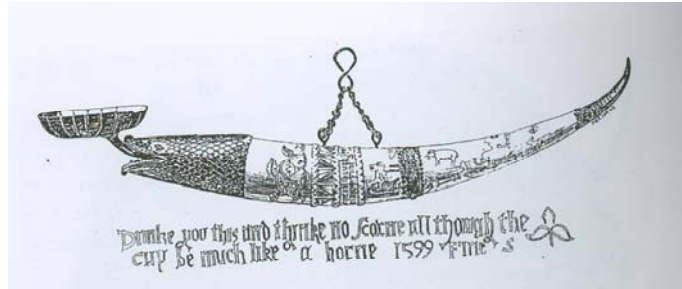


Figure 5.2
 Drawing of an ivory horn with added silver mounts and carvings,
 including the date, 1599.
 The horn itself is attributed to the lower Cross River region.
 L. 59 cm.
 The British Museum, London.
 Source: Bassani, *African Art in Early European Collections*.



Figure 6.1
Ejagham pottery, early 20th century.
Source: Talbot, *In the Shadow of the Bush*.

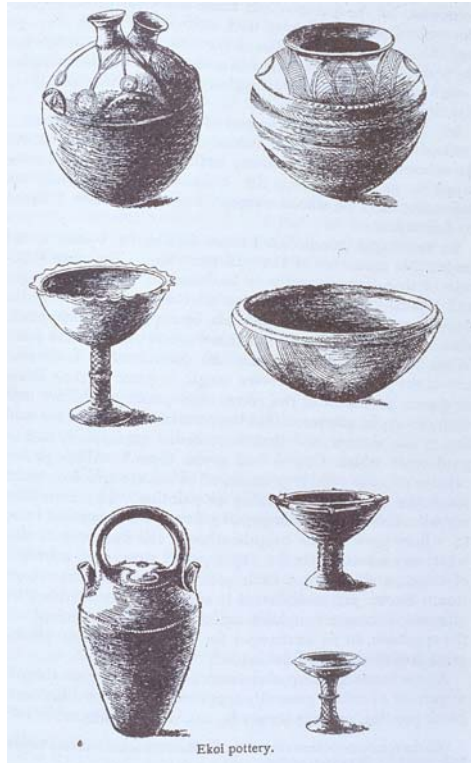


Figure 6.2
 Ejagham pottery, early 20th century.
 Source: Talbot, *In the Shadow of the Bush*.

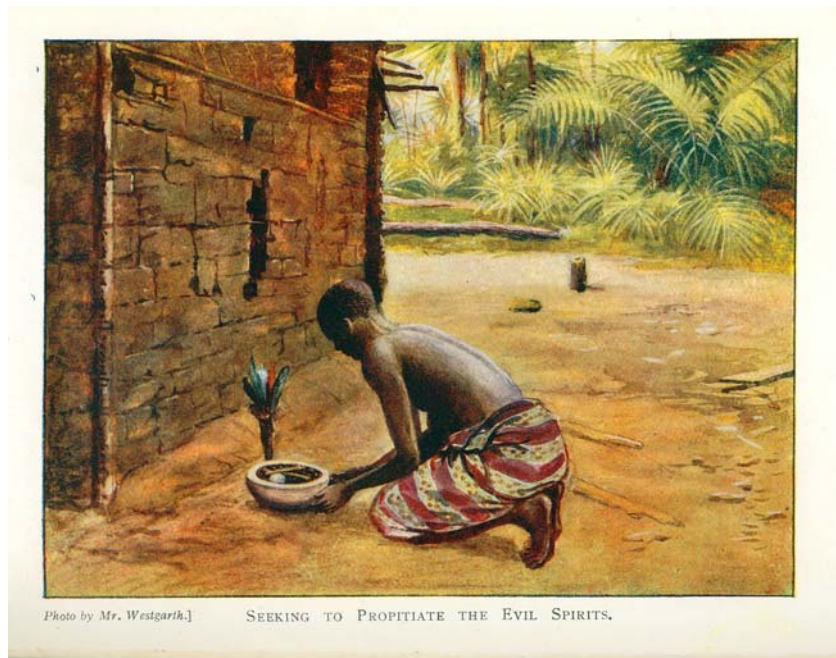


Figure 6.3
A scene of pottery used in a private ceremonial context.
Probably Ibibio, early 20th century.
Source: M'Keown, 1912.

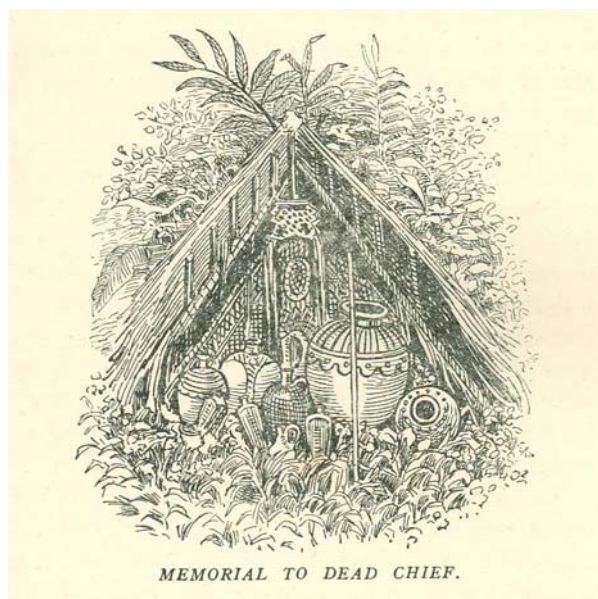


Figure 6.4
Memorial shrine containing decorated pottery.
Probably Ibibio, early 20th century.
Source: M'Keown, 1912.

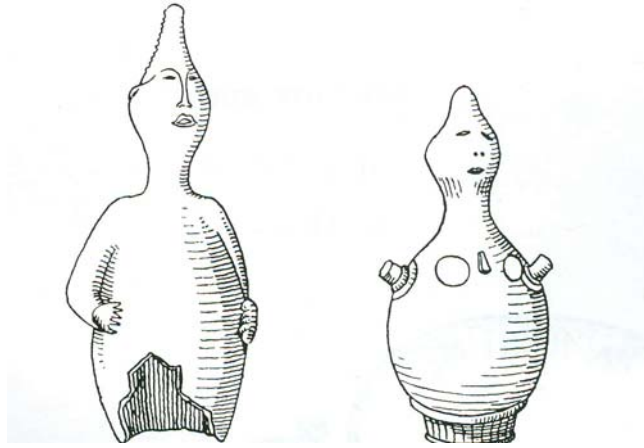


Figure 6.5
Anthropomorphic terracotta figurines.
Igbo, early 20th century.
Source: Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria*, v.II,

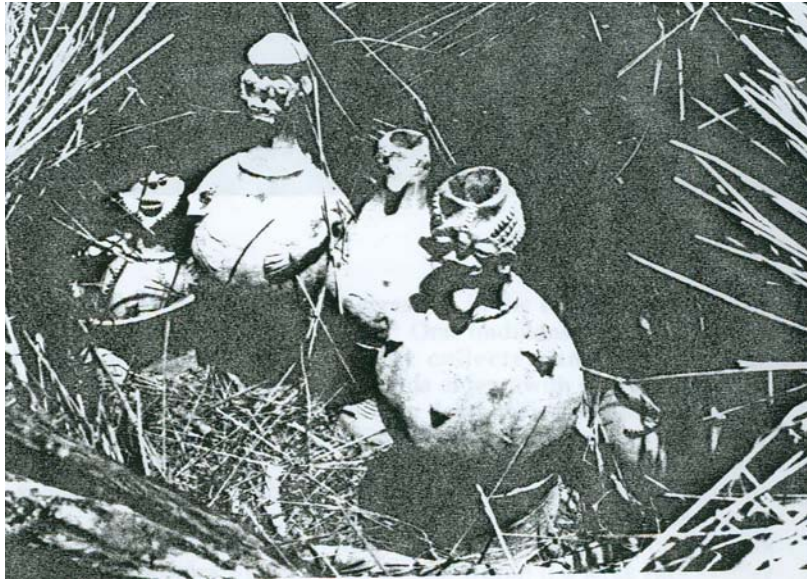


Figure 6.6
Anthropomorphic terracotta figurines, *wiiso*.
Yungur, Northeastern Nigeria, 1981.
Photograph by Marla Berns.
Source: Berns, “Ceramic Clues: Art History in the Gongola Valley.”

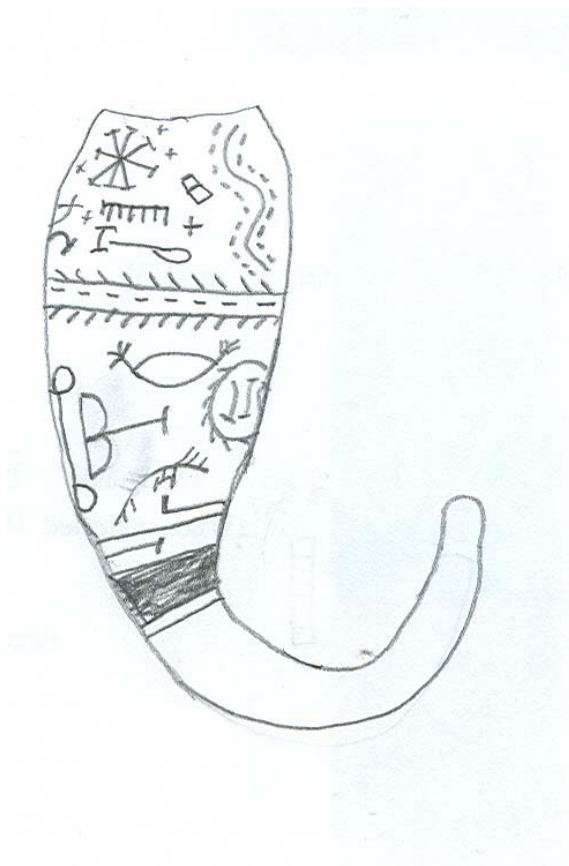


Figure 6.7
Calabash cup with *nsibidi* decoration.
H. 16.3 cm.
Collected in 1914 by P. A. Talbot.
Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford, 1914.26.5.
Drawing by Christopher Slogar.

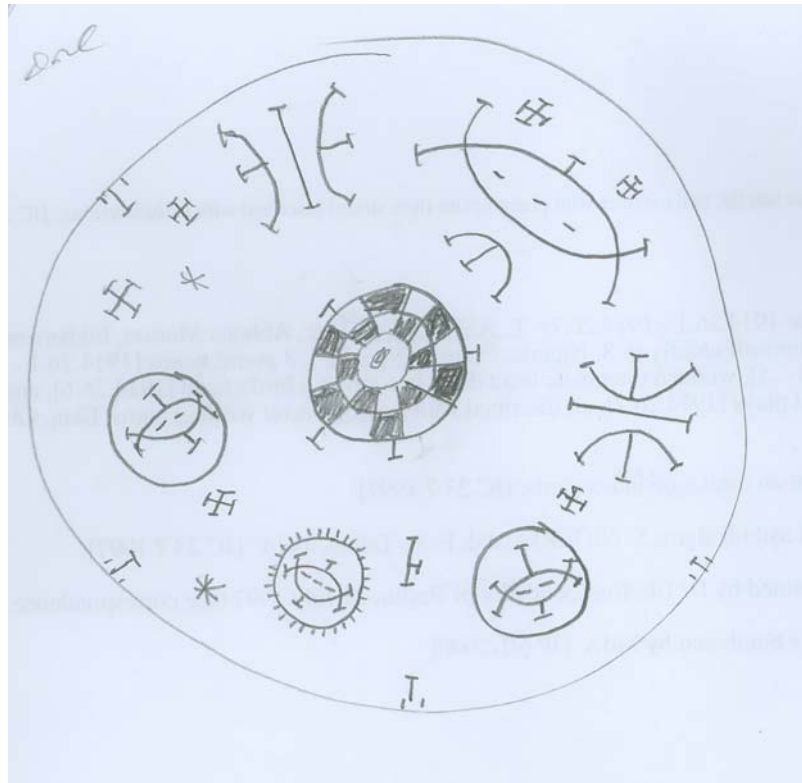


Figure 6.8
Nsibidi decoration of a calabash lid.
 D. 20. cm.
 Collected before 1914 by P. A. Talbot.
 Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford, 1914.26.1.
 Drawing by Christopher Slogar.

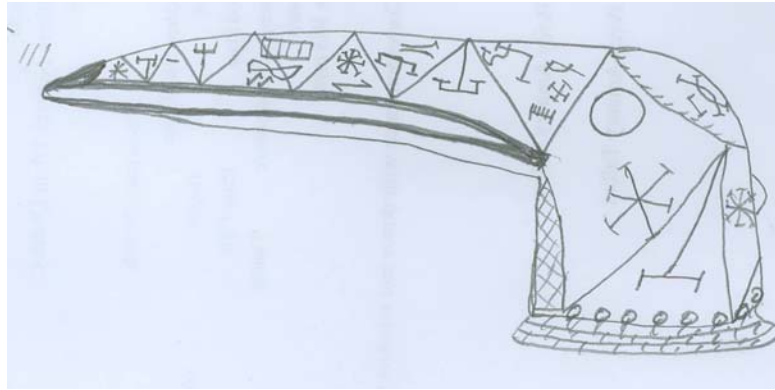


Figure 6.9
 Wood headdress in the form of a bird with *nsibidi* decoration.
 H. 16.3 cm.
 Collected in Oban District (Ejagham) before 1914 by P. A. Talbot,
 who associated it with the Leopard Society.
 Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford, 1914.26.6.
 Drawing by Christopher Slogar.



Figure 6.10

Ink drawing by Heinrich Meinhard of a brass tray depicting a mermaid/water spirit surrounded by *nsibidi*.

M. D. W. Jeffreys collection (file 28), University Archives,
University of the Witwatersrand.

The tray itself (D.74.5 cm) was collected before 1942 by M. D. W. Jeffreys and is now in the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, 1942.13.1089.

Image reproduced courtesy of Tom Meinhard and the Pitt Rivers Museum.

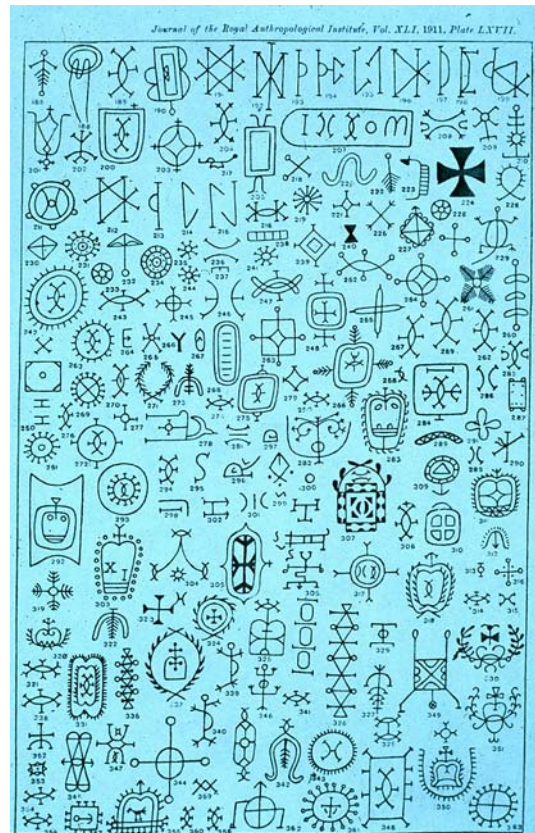


Figure 6.11
Nsibidi signs collected in the early twentieth century by J. K. Macgregor.
 Source: Macgregor.

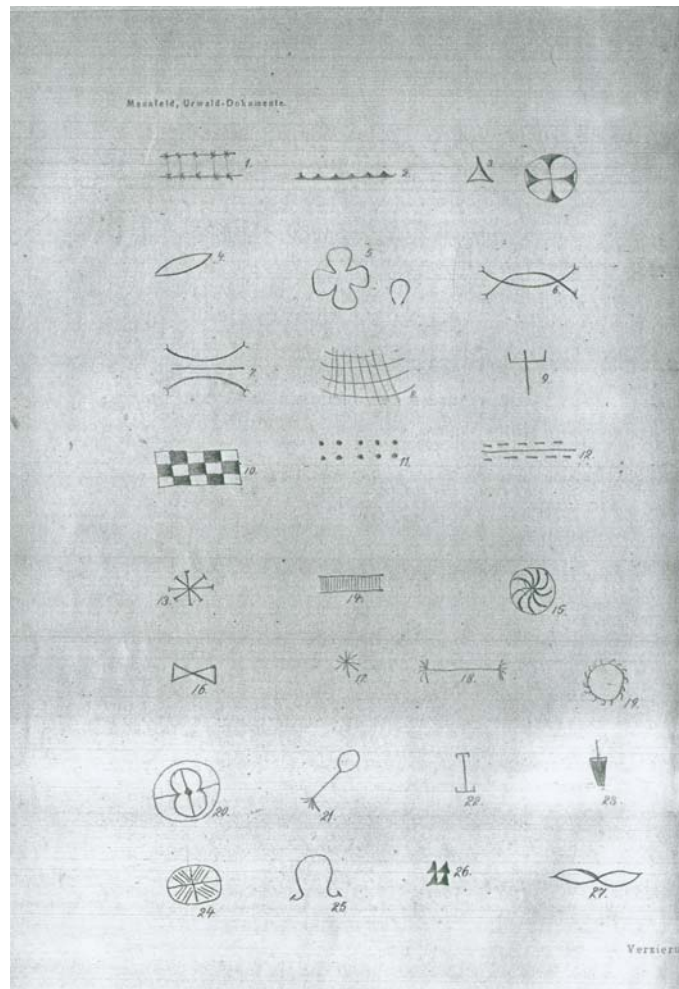


Figure 6.12
Nsibidi signs collected in the upper Cross River area in the early twentieth century by Alfred Mansfeld.
 Source: Mansfeld.

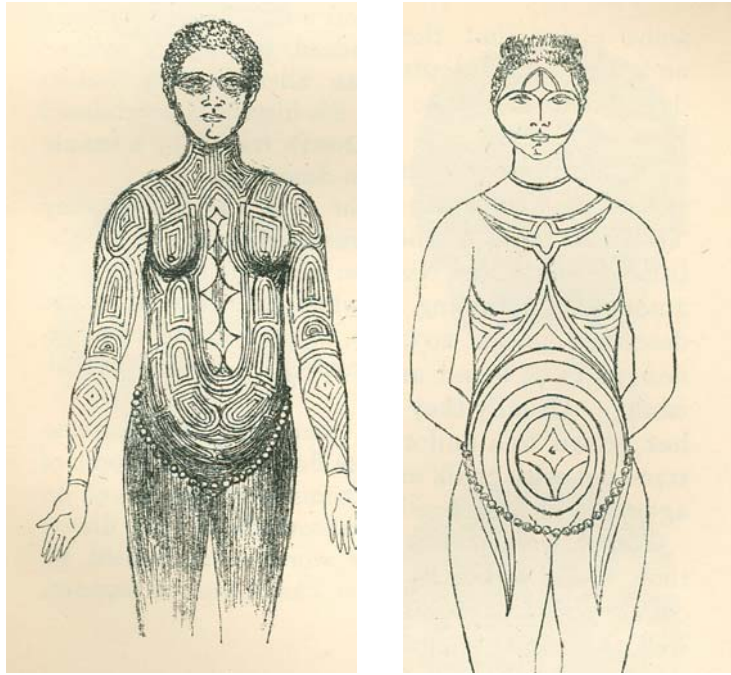


Figure 6.13
Ejagham women's body decoration, before 1912.
Source: Talbot, *In the Shadow of the Bush*.

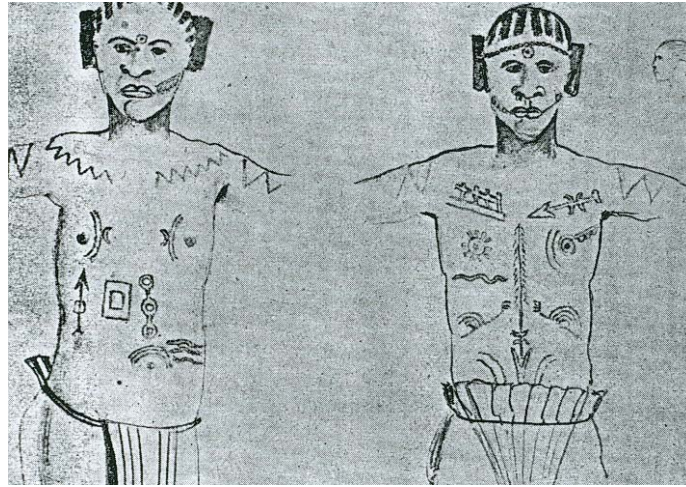


Figure 6.14
Body art in southwest Cameroon, late nineteenth century.
Source: Hutter.

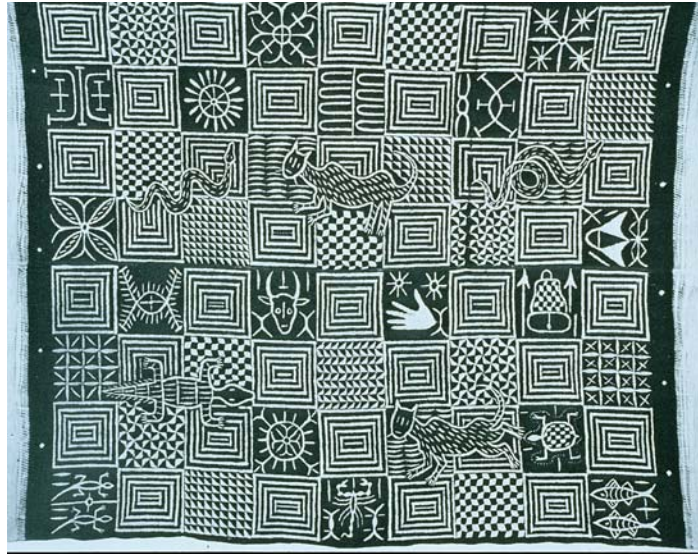


Figure 6.15
Leopard Society cloth, *ukara*.
Igbo, twentieth century.
W. 256.5 cm.

UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, Los Angeles, X84-24.
Source: Cole and Ross.



Figure 6.16
Leopard Society cloth, *ukara*.
Igbo, twentieth century.

Collection of Barry and Toby Hecht.
Photograph courtesy of The Art Gallery, University of Maryland.

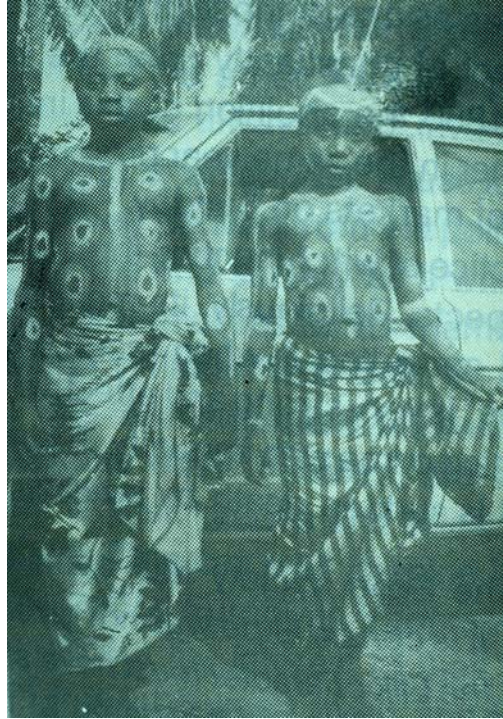


Figure 6.17
Young Efik Leopard Society initiates, Calabar.
Source: Akak, *Efiks of Old Calabar*, v. IV.

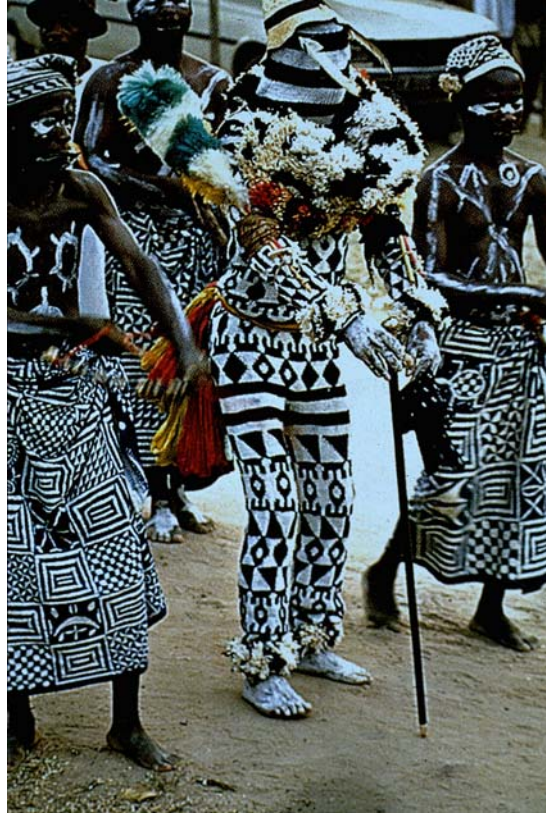


Figure 6.18

Procession of Igbo Leopard Society members wearing *ukara* cloth during the funeral of a fellow member in 1988. Note the cruciforms, circles, and arc motifs decorating the men escorting the masquerader.

Photograph by Eli Bentor.

Source: Perani and Smith: *The Visual Arts of Africa: Gender, Power, and Life Cycle Rituals*.

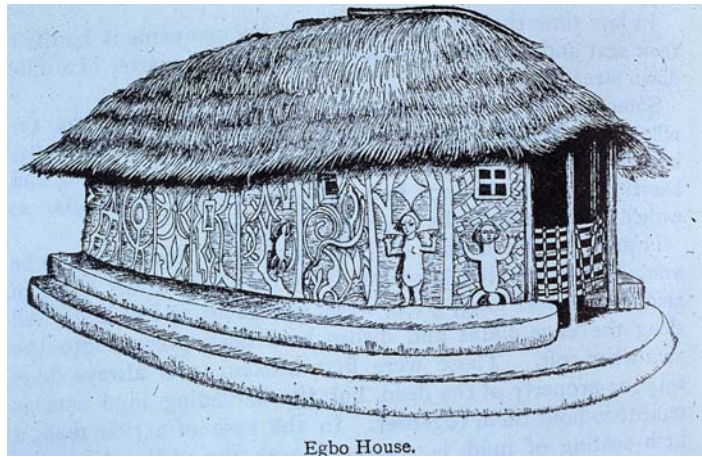


Figure 6.19

Ejagham Leopard Society meeting house.

Ndebiji, upper Cross River area, before 1912.

Note the elaborate decoration combining geometric designs with naturalistic images, as in *ukara*.

Source: Talbot, *In the Shadow of the Bush*.

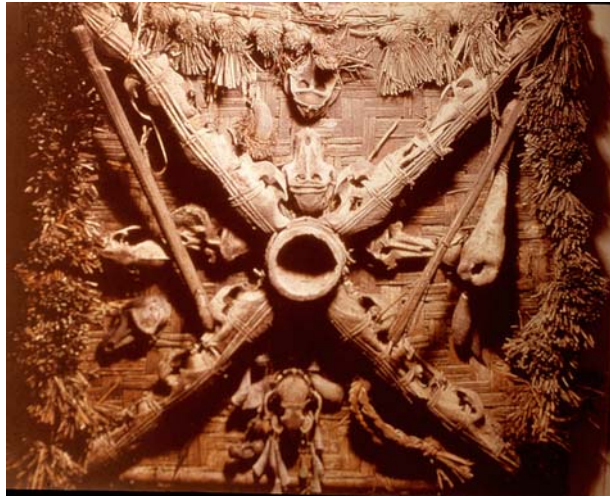


Figure 6.20
Leopard Society Emblem, Ejagham.
H. 127 cm, W. 132 cm.
Collection of Charles and Kent Davis.
Source: Nicklin, "Emblem of the leopard spirit society."



Figure 6.21
Widekum *Nchibi* masquerade.
Upper Cross River area, before 1930.
Source: Migeod.



Figure 6.22
Nnabo masquerade, Calabar.
Note the cowrie-shell geometric designs on the costumes.
Photograph courtesy of Ekpo Eyo.

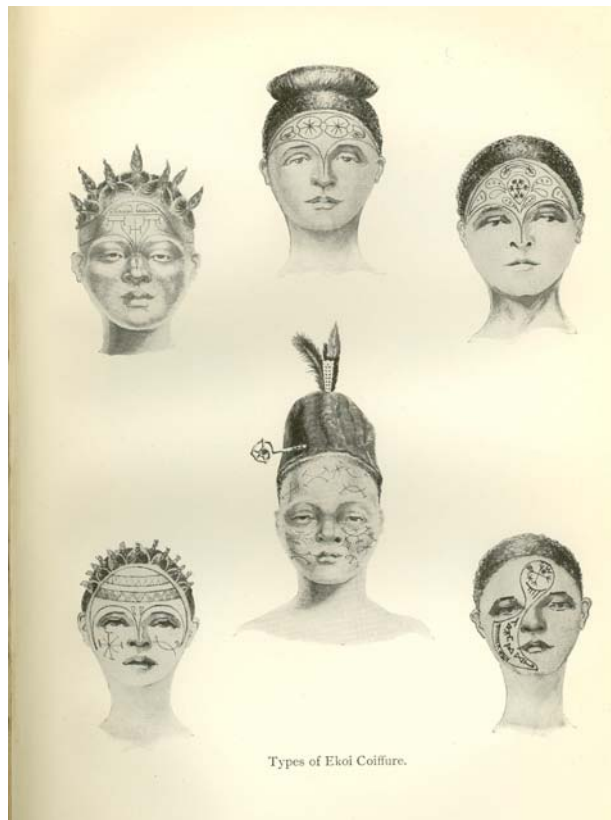


Figure 6.23
 Ejagham girls' facial decoration with *nsibidi*.
 Upper Cross River region, before 1912.
 Source: Talbot, *In the Shadow of the Bush*.



Figure 6.24
Ibibio wood figure of an *Mbopo*.
Note the whorl design on the abdomen.
Source: *Art of the Ibo, Ibibio, Ogoni*.

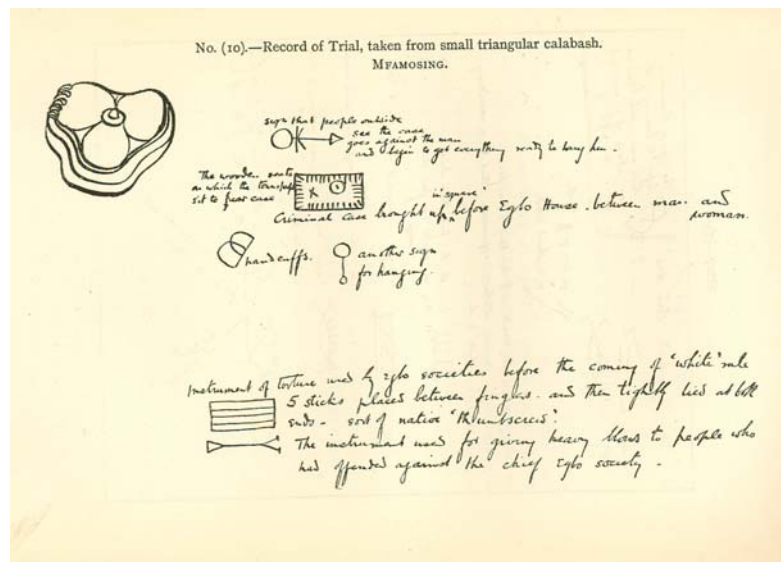


Figure 6.25
Nsibidi on a calabash, which reportedly records a trial held at Mfamosing.
Ejagham, upper Cross River area, before 1912.
Source: Talbot, *In the Shadow of the Bush*.



Figure 7.1

Left: Copper-alloy figurine.
Tiv, Benue River region, Nigeria.
H. 15.5 cm.
Ex-Collection Hubert Goldet.
Source: *Collection Hubert Goldet*.

Right: (Figure 4.124)
Anthropomorphic terracotta figurine from the Obot Okoho/Okang Mbang area.
H. 30 cm (approximate).
Owner: Ekpo Eyo.
Photograph by Christopher Slogar, courtesy of Ekpo Eyo.



Figure A.1
Sapi-Portuguese ivory horn, ca. sixteenth century.
L. 54 cm.
Private collection.
Source: Bassani and Fagg.



Figure A.2
Bini-Portuguese ivory saltcellar.
H. 29.2 cm.
The British Museum, London.
Ethnography Department, inv. no. 78.11.1.48.
Source: Bassani, *African Art in European Collections*.



Figure A.3
Sebastian Münster
Aethiopia, published 1540.
Source: Bagrow and Skelton.

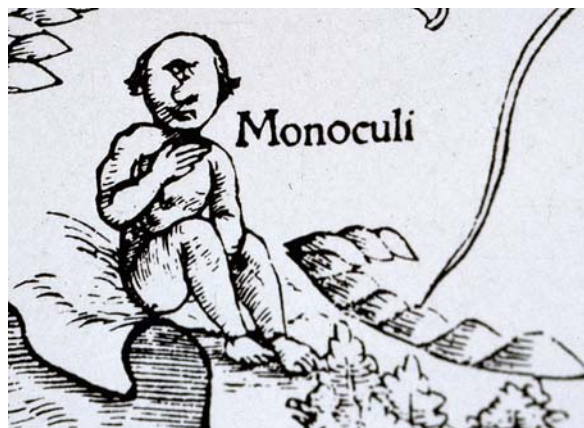


Figure A.4
Aethiopia (detail).

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